

# *RED TOWERS*

*ELEANOR C. PRICE*



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# RED TOWERS

BY

ELEANOR C. PRICE

AUTHOR OF 'ALEXIA,' 'GERALD,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



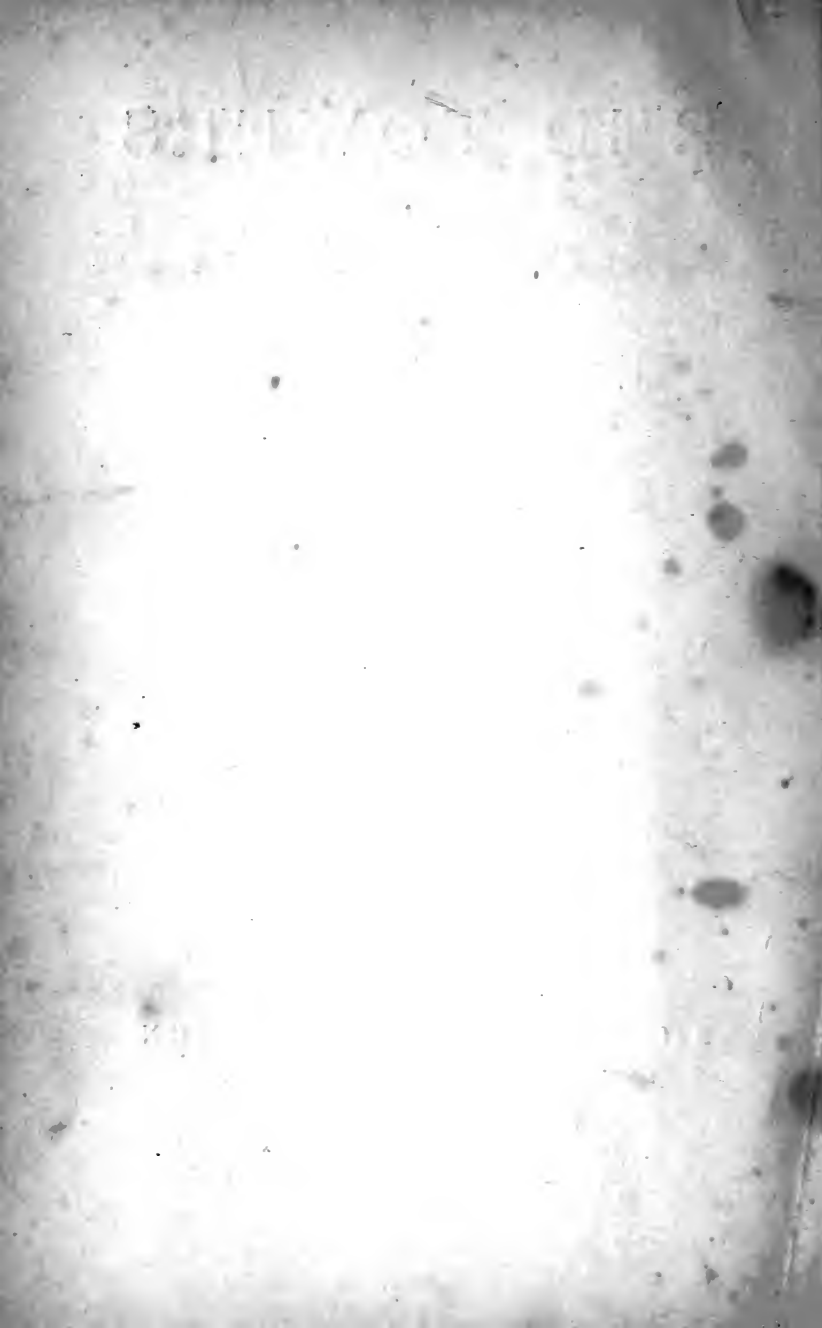
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# RED TOWERS

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## PART I.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE SQUIRE AND THE COLONEL.

HIDDEN and very remote among the Surrey hills, 'away from men and towns,' little haunted by tourists, except of the artist kind, approached by narrow and intricate lanes, which wind between deep banks among the woods, and climb up and down breakneck hills from one valley to another,

lies Red Towers, the old house belonging to Paul Romaine.

It is six miles from the station, and two from its parish church and village of Holm ; but it is not quite lonely, for it stands on the edge of a clearing in the woods—a small common, crossed by sandy roads, which come up here into the light, on the high ground, before plunging down into shadows and hollows again. On the common there are a few low stone cottages, their gardens almost invaded by bracken and heather, and sheltered by tall pines, the advanced guard of the wood.

At one corner of the common stands the little new house that was built for Canon Percival ; at the other end, nearly opposite the gate of Red Towers, is the quaint old dark cottage where Colonel Ward lived for many years. Red Towers itself cannot be seen from the common, being hidden in

depths of wood ; but it is the great house of the place.

Houses, cottages, woods, all those sandy unprofitable tracts of wild ground, belong to Paul Romaine. He is landlord and lord of the manor there, with a power and independence that many greater landlords might envy. His forefathers have been in the same position for three hundred years.

One Sunday afternoon in September, a few years ago, Colonel Ward and Mr. Romaine, and six or seven dogs, were coming back from a walk together. The two men were as different from each other as intimate friends could be. Colonel Ward was sixty, short, grey, and close-cropped ; he was very upright and military, with blue, clear-seeing eyes, and he was not at all afraid of using his cane on dogs or children, who, however, invariably made friends with him.

Paul Romaine, who was the Colonel's friend by right of inheritance, in succession to his father, was a tall young fellow of three-and-twenty, so quiet in look and manner as to give outsiders no idea of the talents that had taken a First Class a few weeks before. He strolled along, slouching carelessly, by the Colonel's side; his eyes looked half asleep; his dark face, rather thin and delicately cut, expressed nothing but a sort of indifferent content. Paul was not a great talker, except now and then, when he had something to say. He let the Colonel talk, and knew how to listen—'which is not so easy as one thinks, and which no stupid man was ever capable of.'

They came up out of the dark, soft paths, the deep silence of the fir-wood, a real thing that day, for not the faintest wind was stirring. They crossed the common among



dying heather and great yellow fronds of bracken, and red blackberry brambles flung across the narrow paths that children and dogs had made. Opposite them, the chimneys of Canon Percival's house stood up against a clear sky and lower levels of wood, not fir-wood there, but masses of varied leaves beginning to change.

Colonel Ward flourished his stick towards the chimneys.

‘Why did your father do that, Paul?’ he said. ‘Spoilt the place, spoilt the common, and all for nothing. They never come here, and perhaps it is as well they shouldn’t. But it brings interlopers—artists, and all kinds of rubbish. We have had horrid people there this summer—vulgar, unpleasant people. Yes, Mrs. Percival liked it at first, but she is tired of it now.’

‘They are coming next month,’ said Paul.

‘No ! Are they?’ exclaimed the Colonel, in a voice of the greatest delight.

‘As soon as his residence is over. What’s-his-name is going back to India.’

‘That’s a good thing,’ said Colonel Ward. ‘You don’t like him, Paul, do you?’

‘We don’t get on much,’ said Paul.

‘I bet you don’t. The most conceited puppy I ever met—correcting me about things I knew before he was born. People tell me all young fellows are like that, but I don’t believe them. Can’t imagine how the Canon can stand such an ass in the house ; but he never had much sense.’

Paul laughed. ‘But you’re singular, you know,’ he said. ‘Most people like Vincent about there. He’s a great swell in the Close.’

‘Ah ! the Close !’ said Colonel Ward wickedly. ‘Yes, I dare say he suits them well : they make a fine hero of him.’

‘Well, they are all very jolly,’ said Paul in his lazy way.

They were now walking side by side along the road that led to their two houses, past the shady garden of the post-office, and one or two other cottages. The Colonel’s eyes were everywhere ; Paul looked absently straight before him.

‘Don’t go in too much for these clerical people,’ said the Colonel. ‘Your father was the finest man that ever lived, and my greatest friend ; but I never could understand his friendship for old Percival. And not giving him up, too, when he married the woman we were all in love with. However, your father was not so far gone as I was, Paul—of course not—your dear mother soon consoled him. For my part, I never could forgive Percival.’

‘You don’t seem revengeful,’ said Paul.

It seemed necessary to say something, though he knew all this by heart, having heard the whole story from Colonel Ward a hundred times before.

‘I’m civilized, of course ; I can’t show my feelings,’ said the Colonel. ‘Besides, Mrs. Percival must always be her old self to me ; and she knows it. She knows she can count upon me. I don’t believe in being faithless to old friends, Paul.’

‘Well, my father and the Canon were friends at school.’

‘Ah, well, your father was right, of course. But Percival was never good enough for him. A hollow sort of chap ; and those men do more harm than good, especially when they go into the Church, which ought to keep up its character. No ; I never cared for your seeing so much of Percival.’

‘I couldn’t help it, as he was my guardian,’ said Paul, ‘and they have always been awfully good to me.’

‘What a strange thing that was, now!’ said Colonel Ward. ‘As if one guardian was not enough for a fellow. I could have managed you and your affairs well enough by myself, and I should have arranged things rather differently. You are a fine fellow, no doubt, with your degree, and so on; but in my opinion you have studied too much. A man with property, like you, has something to think of besides the classics. Everything here might have gone to the dogs, in the two years since you were of age, while you were reading as if your life depended on it. All Percival’s doing: your father would not have cared for all that.’

‘But things have not gone to the dogs, thanks to you.’

‘No thanks at all. I happened to be living here ; I kept my eyes open, and saw that people did their duty. By-the-bye, you ought not to keep that old fellow at the post-office. He is a lazy old scoundrel. His wife does all the work, and she is a tremendous gossip. I don’t approve of them.’

‘They have been here such a long time,’ said Paul.

Colonel Ward came to a stand at his own gate, and the dogs thronged round him ; they were all his dogs, a family of Clumber spaniels, except Paul’s little rough terrier, who jumped up at his master’s hand, proud of belonging to him.

A low dark arch over the gate led into Colonel Ward’s garden ; the windows of his house peeped out with difficulty under masses of ivy and Virginian creeper, which hung over the porch, so that a tall man had

to stoop to go in. The smooth turf of the garden was all bordered with brilliant flowers ; it was a charming little place in summer—all the year round, its master thought.

He stood among his dogs and looked at Paul with bright impatient eyes. He loved Paul ; but how his friend, Sir Paul Romaine, K.C.B., the distinguished, dashing cavalry soldier, who, next to Mrs. Percival, had been the enthusiasm of his life, came to have a son like this, must always be a mystery. He was haunted by a fear that Paul might choose to be a clergyman, or might go in for science of some kind, or take to composing music, or writing books ; he believed him to be capable of anything of this kind. Not that he did not respect these occupations, especially the first of them, for he was a good and a clever man in his way ; but as

Paul could not, or would not, be a soldier, he thought that Providence must mean him to be a landlord and a politician. He was terribly afraid that Paul would turn into an oddity, an old bachelor like himself ; and in objecting to Paul's intimacy with the Percivals, he forgot that they in their commonplace world of gossip, and fashion, and tennis, were a strong influence the other way.

‘How are you going to learn to manage your tenants, I wonder !’ he said, and he looked hard at the young Squire standing in the middle of the road. ‘We shall soon have all the bad characters in the country settled on Holm Common.’

‘There wouldn’t be room for them, unless I build more cottages,’ said Paul.

The Colonel swung his stick and laughed.

‘There’s only one hope for you, Paul,’ he said. ‘You’re young, to be sure, to talk



about it—but you must marry a sensible woman.'

Paul made no direct answer to this. He had turned half away, playing with Scamp, who was impatient to be moving off again ; and Colonel Ward did not see his smile or the light that suddenly woke in his eyes. Perhaps he was not so young as his old friend thought, after all.

'I say, Colonel, will you come and dine with me to-night ?'

'All right. Nobody else ?'

'No, nobody else,' said Paul ; and then the Colonel with his family dived into his little dark den, and Paul and Scamp went off at a great pace to their abode in the woods.

When the two friends met again, three hours later, Colonel Ward looked the picture of cheerful smartness, while Paul was flushed and tired. He had been to church, and,

finding that the organist was away on his holiday, he had put on a surplice and played the organ, as he used to do in more boyish days. After service, he went on playing for twenty minutes or more ; a few people lingered in and near the church to listen, for the grand strains of a wedding or triumphal march—which yet could be traced to no known composer—echoed in the high roof and rolled out through open doors and windows into the quiet churchyard, with its yew-trees, down to the valley where other people were slowly walking home.

The Vicar, a shy young man, who always found Paul hard to get on with, came up to him afterwards at the church-door, in the twilight, and asked him if that music came from the mountains ; for Paul had been in Switzerland nearly all the summer, almost ever since he left Oxford.

‘No,’ said Paul; ‘it came from Woolsborough.’

‘Ah! from the Cathedral!’ said the Vicar, thinking he had made a mistake; and Paul did not correct him further.

The establishment at Red Towers was small and military. Indoors, Sabin ruled. He, in former years, had been Sir Paul’s soldier-servant. Ford, the groom, a very solemn fellow, had belonged to the same regiment. Mrs. Sabin was housekeeper and cook, with two maids under her. Out of doors there were two or three gardeners, one of whom had been a soldier. The house had never been let since Sir Paul’s death, seven years ago, but had been kept in splendid order by these servants, under Colonel Ward’s vigilant eye. Mr. Bailey, the agent, sometimes came down from London; and Canon and Mrs. Percival

walked about agreeably, and enjoyed the garden and the woods when they were in *villeggiatura* at their little house hard by. The young master was there sometimes, too. He was always a solitary boy, with a taste for moping about at home, which his guardian's wife struggled against as much as she could. And she succeeded in getting him away a great deal, for Paul, like most other people, was very fond of her.

The rooms at Red Towers were large and rather gloomy, being furnished heavily and in dark colours. The whole effect was dark, beginning with the black oak window-frames ; and there was nothing modern in the house at all. The Romaines had never lived there much ; they were nearly always soldiers ; and their wives generally did not like it. The present house had been built

by one of them about the time of James II. It was a sort of place that wanted large families, dogs, games, cheerfulness. The rustling of the woods and their weird cries and noises had always been rather terrible to anxious women waiting for news from battle-fields.

The rooms at Red Towers opened chiefly into each other, and Mrs. Sabin very often kept the shutters shut for weeks together ; she thought light was not good for the fine old pictures and the beautiful china. Now and then she condescended to show these treasures to some intelligent and fascinating tourist ; but very seldom. Colonel Ward never failed to hear of these exhibitions, and they made him angry.

When the Squire was at home, all the rooms were open, and carefully arranged. He could spend as much time as he liked

among his forefathers and their possessions, and sometimes, in fact, he would stroll through the room with his hands in his pockets, looking up at the pictures as if he wished they could talk to him.

But he lived chiefly in a small room near the entrance, close to the square tower which held the hall and staircase. This room had two windows, one in the angle by the tower, looking out on a corner of red wall, and woods beyond it, the other on a wide sheltered lawn with rose-beds and cedar-trees. The windows were near the ground, and Paul, with his long legs, could jump out easily. The walls of his room were covered with heavy bookcases, now full of modern books, which had arrived that summer in large cases from Oxford. Colonel Ward had unpacked and settled them with his own hands while Paul was abroad, sending

away the old ones into the much less literary room which was called the library. There was a piano in a corner, and over the chimney-piece were two small portraits of Paul's father and mother when they were young. In a velvet frame underneath hung a few miniatures, and Sir Paul's medals; Mrs. Percival had arranged that frame for the young man at Oxford. Above the portraits hung Sir Paul's sword; and on the black carved mantelpiece were his travelling-clock and a few things that belonged to him. Paul's peaceful propensities did not mean any want of pride in his father.

Sabin would have thought it much more correct that his master and Colonel Ward should dine in the large dining-room. But Paul said, 'No, in the study;' so into the study Sabin brought his fine old plate, his

Worcester china, his best wine, and waited on the two friends with a beaming benevolence which made the nervous Colonel glance at him severely.

After dinner, when Sabin was gone, Paul became very silent and dreamy ; even Scamp could hardly catch his attention. At last the Colonel, who was smoking and talking serenely, noticed his host's absence of mind, and fixed his eyes upon him in a momentary anxiety. Paul always looked young, for he wore no hair on his face ; but that evening he looked like a boy of eighteen. He looked very handsome, too ; eyelids drooping a little over dark eyes like his mother's, and faintly smiling, some new life lighting up the dreams that had taken hold of him. Suddenly, as the Colonel stared at him curiously—but quite unaware of that—he looked up and said :



‘Colonel, you were saying something this afternoon about marrying——’

Colonel Ward stared still more, in consternation now.

‘What! My dear chap, take care what you are doing. Don’t be in a hurry, whatever you do!’

‘No,’ said Paul, ‘I have not been in a hurry. Do you mind our going outside, and talking about it? This room is so fearfully hot.’





## CHAPTER II.

### OWLS.

OUTSIDE in the garden all was coolness and stillness. The woods hardly rustled, that quiet evening, and all their living creatures seemed to be asleep. The old red brick house lay dark in the moonlight ; its rather fantastic towers and chimney-tops standing out clear ; its long rows of windows shining ; its ivy and Virginian creeper hanging in silvered masses. On the lawn there were spaces of clear light and deep shadow, and the great dark cedars stretched their arms motionless.

Even outside here, in the free air, with his old friend, Paul seemed to find it difficult to go on with his subject. Colonel Ward smoked his pipe, as they walked up and down, and waited for him as long as he could. At last he said, with real anxiety in his voice :

‘Talk away, my boy; what is all this about? Hang it, Paul, you are not in earnest, are you?’

‘Yes, I’m in earnest.’

‘But nothing positive—nothing settled, of course?’

‘Well, yes, it is settled; at least, I hope so. Yes, Colonel, it was settled just before I went abroad; but we agreed to say nothing about it. I suppose everybody will know soon now. I don’t see why they shouldn’t.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me before?’ said Colonel Ward rather sharply.

‘You must not mind about that, you know,’ the young man answered quickly. ‘Mrs. Percival wouldn’t let me say anything, and of course I had to do as they wished. She wanted me to wait till they came here; it would make such a lot of talk at Woolsborough. I am going to Woolsborough now, though—but I came here first—partly on purpose to tell you.’

From Paul’s manner, and rather hurried way of talking, it was plain that he did not expect his old friend to be much pleased with the news he had to tell him. Colonel Ward listened to him gravely, and did not speak quite at once.

‘Ah! Then I may be supposed to know who it is,’ he said presently. ‘Mrs. Percival—well, there may be some excuse for her. Women don’t always know at once what view to take, and, no doubt, she found she

had to do with an obstinate young fool. But Percival was very wrong. He ought to have interfered. He ought to have put a stop to the thing at once. That is what an honourable man would have done.'

'I don't see why,' said Paul.

'You would see plainly enough in another man's case. Percival was your guardian. A year ago his wife's niece came to live with him—a girl whose parents were good-for-nothing, and who had been badly trained in every way.'

'Look here, Colonel, you always say what you like——'

'Yes, and I mean to do so still.'

'You must remember that you don't know Miss Darrell. You have only seen her once.'

'I know all about her,' said the Colonel.  
'I grant you she is a very pretty girl.'

Clever, too; I haven't a doubt of that. But she has nothing, and for that and twenty other reasons she is not the right match for you. And the Percivals ought not to have listened to such a thing for a moment. They were bound in honour to resist the very notion. A young fellow with a good property like you, with your talents, and a grand future before you! Why, hang it, Paul, you might marry anybody! What the deuce was old Percival thinking about? I always knew he was a fool, but hang me if I knew he was a knave.'

'He couldn't have prevented it. He had nothing to do with it,' said Paul.

'My dear fellow, that's nonsense. I wonder at Mrs. Percival. But I suppose she took the sentimental view; she always was soft-hearted. And this is not the

first mistake she has made, I am sorry to say. How long has this affair been going on ?

‘ For a year, with me. Ever since I first saw her. But I said nothing till I went down from Oxford the other day. And you are awfully unfair to the Percivals, you know, Colonel. Mrs. Percival thought at first I was too young ; and then she wouldn’t have anything said about it all the summer.’

‘ I see nothing in that, if she allowed the thing to go on at all,’ said Colonel Ward dismally ; he was torn between loyalty to his old love and faithfulness to the interests of Paul Romaine. ‘ Do you write to the young lady ?’

‘ Of course ; we are engaged,’ said Paul.

‘ And do you mean to tell me that nobody knows anything about it ?’

‘ Canon and Mrs. Percival ; nobody else. They have not even told Vincent.’

‘ Why not ?’

‘ I don’t know. The fewer people the better, she thought. And I think Vincent isn’t always the pleasantest fellow in the world ; and as he was to be there all the summer, perhaps it was better for her that he shouldn’t know—because he and I don’t get on particularly well. He might have made himself disagreeable. But of course Mrs. Percival did not tell me any reasons like those ; I have only guessed them. She said it was best that only she and the Canon should know. And it was easy, as I was going abroad.’

‘ If the thing was allowed at all, I see no reason for keeping it secret,’ said Colonel Ward. ‘ I shall ask her to explain that to me one of these days.’



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Then he and Paul walked the whole length of the lawn, past the cedars, from light to shadow, and back to light again, without saying anything more. The Colonel in his honest old heart was very unhappy. Though he would not exactly say so, he thought Mrs. Percival had done very wrong. There could be no doubt, really, that the whole thing was her doing. With a penniless niece on her hands, of course she had encouraged Paul. A young fellow at college, open, enthusiastic, simple-hearted, he was ready to fall in love with anybody; and Miss Darrell was a very attractive girl. All the unhappy history of her father and mother had been told to the Colonel by Mrs. Percival herself; the girl was friendless, homeless, penniless. The chance of such a marriage as this for her was, no doubt, a great temptation to her aunt;

but, to Colonel Ward's mind, a temptation which ought at all costs to have been resisted. He was a man of strict notions and high old-fashioned ideas ; his prejudices, therefore, were strong ; and Mrs. Percival's niece was just the kind of girl who always made him reflect on the degeneracy of the age. He did not like her ; and the news of her engagement to Paul seemed to him worse than any news he had heard since Sir Paul Romaine died.

The Colonel was hurt, too, though he did not wish to show it. Under his stiff grey outside there was a great deal of warm affection, with the sensitiveness which is its wrong side. He had thought that there was always a perfect confidence between himself and Paul, whom he loved as if he were his son. He had flattered himself that all Paul's tastes, and ways, and weaknesses

were known to him, as they would have been known to Paul's father ; and he had never really much dreaded the influence of the Percivals, though he talked about it, feeling sure that Paul was his own boy in spite of them. It was something of a shock to him to find how far that influence had now extended itself ; that Paul, body and soul, was to belong all his life to the Percivals ; and that this thing had been going on for a whole year past, while he, the blind old friend, had thought that Paul was only too much wrapped up in reading for honours.

‘ And this is a settled thing ! ’ said the Colonel at last. He spoke sadly, but not angrily ; after all, young people must be young, and it was not Paul he was angry with. He himself had remained unmarried always for the sake of a foolish woman. ‘ No

hope of any change!' he went on, perhaps hardly speaking to Paul.

'No fear of any,' said the young man, smiling. 'Look here, Colonel, it makes me awfully happy, you know, and you must congratulate me.'

'No—can't do that,' said the Colonel.

'You will when you know Celia a little better.'

The Colonel shook his head.

'I won't deny, my friend,' he said, 'that this news of yours has startled me considerably. I can't talk to you about it now. I must go home and think it over. Good-night.'

'No, Colonel, I won't let you,' said Paul, taking hold of his arm. 'You must be convinced; I'm going to argue with you.'

'You may as well argue with the owls, my boy. I'm a kill-joy, I know. I'm a

prophet of evil ; but I don't like this engagement of yours. Miss Darrell is pretty ; in fact, she comes as near being beautiful as any woman I ever saw ; and no doubt she has taking manners. But if she had money as well, she is not the wife I should choose for you. I believe in heredity, and she comes of a bad stock. Her tendencies are horsey, and I hate horsey women. Her father was an idle, dissipated chap, never to be seen off a racecourse ; and her mother, poor thing, was as weak as water.'

At that moment the silence of the night was broken by a wild 'Tu whit, tu whoo !' and an owl flew slowly across, in the moonshine, from one great tree to another. Paul was, in fact, arguing with the owls, it seemed.

'I know all that,' he said, in answer to the Colonel. 'But I don't know why she

should be made responsible for their sins.'

He might very well have been angry ; but he had a philosophy of his own, which at this time took the form of perfect trust. In his mind he knew and trusted Celia so entirely, that his old friend's fears and prejudices were only worth a smile. He could not quarrel with him about anything so childish, knowing how easily Celia would captivate the Colonel, when she saw him again.

'Don't you think it will be a very good thing, Colonel,' he went on, 'if she knows more about horses than I do?'

'Well, yes ; you are a muff about horses, certainly, Paul,' Colonel Ward was obliged to confess. 'You would get into endless scrapes in that line, and be cheated right and left, if you hadn't Ford and me to look

after you. It is a miracle that your father's son should be so ignorant.'

'She will manage all that,' said Paul in his low pleasant voice. 'She is very clever; she will look after everything. And she is tremendously kind and charitable, you know—and good—a thousand times too good for me. Why should I be obliged to marry a woman with money? This other arrangement seems quite right to me.'

'To you—but to nobody else, my boy,' said Colonel Ward.

Slowly, under Paul's influence, his indignation was melting away. It was plain that the lad was very happy, very much in love; and he was engaged; and of course there was not the smallest chance of his breaking off his engagement now; the Colonel could not expect or wish him to do that. The

only feeling must be regret and deep vexation ; but still, if Paul really knew anything about Miss Celia Darrell, a little hope might creep in. She might make him a tolerably good wife after all.

‘ Why, Paul,’ he said, ‘ you talk as if you were a millionaire. You’re not, you know.’

‘ We shall do very well,’ said Paul quietly. ‘ We shall live here ; and by-and-by, if you push me on, I may try for Parliament. That is Mrs. Percival’s idea.’

‘ She is quite right, perfectly right,’ said the Colonel, highly pleased ; and with this prospect he forgot all about Paul’s bad news, and began building all sorts of castles in the air.

This was the future he had always fancied for Paul ; fearing all the time that he was too lazy, too refined, too studious, too artistic,



ever to put himself in the way of it. It even occurred once to the Colonel's mind that a spirited woman, if she was really worthy of Paul, might be his greatest help in a political career. Possibly, in Celia Darrell, her father's recklessness might take the form of a courage worth something. The Colonel was afraid not ; for when he had seen her, and heard her talk, dislike had been mixed strongly with his admiration ; but he began to think that he might have done the girl injustice.

So, instead of saying 'good-night' early, and going home sulky to his cottage, Colonel Ward talked politics with Paul for another hour. Paul, to tell the truth, was tired and bored, and wished that he had said nothing about Parliament. At last he took advantage of a pause to change the subject suddenly.

‘I suppose the place will want thoroughly doing up all round,’ he said, looking up at his old towers.

‘Nonsense ! It is in perfectly good order.’

‘I know it isn’t tumbling down ; but it is not half smart enough. People make houses beautiful in these days, don’t they ? Mrs. Percival’s house is awfully pretty. Of course this has a character of its own ; but it is very old-fashioned ; all the things in it are old-fashioned.’

‘Nonsense, Paul ! They were good enough for your mother.’

‘Ah ! but that was long ago. Well, she must look at it all when she comes here. There will be the servants to settle, too—but Mrs. Percival will tell me all about that.’

‘It is not to be a long engagement, then ?’

said Colonel Ward, with something like a sigh.

‘ Why should it be ?’

‘ Why ? Because you are very young ; too young to know your own mind.’

‘ I have known it for a long time.’

‘ Well, about the servants. Of course you must have things correct. I know nothing. I have been out of the world too long. Mrs. Percival will tell you, as you say. One thing I feel pretty sure of—you will have to part with the Sabins.’

‘ No ; why should I do that ?’ exclaimed Paul almost angrily.

‘ Mrs. Sabin has been used to having her own way far too long ; she won’t knock under. And Sabin—to tell you the truth, I have not been satisfied with Sabin for some time past. He is too familiar ; his manners are shocking. To-night, at dinner,

I thought he was vulgar ; broad grins the whole time. . He has been a faithful servant, no doubt ; but you will have to part with him ; your wife will never endure him. She will like to have her own way in the house.'

' Poor old Sabin ! I never noticed anything wrong. He always does what I tell him. Of course, if Celia doesn't like him and his wife, that will be another affair ; but I think she will. They are sure to be awfully nice to her. It would be a horrid bother to part with them.'

' You will find a good many horrid bothers in store for you, my boy. You had better have been contented as you are.'

' Why, Colonel, it was only this afternoon that you told me I ought to marry a sensible woman.'

' I didn't mean what I said,' answered the Colonel boldly.

It was near midnight when Paul walked with him up the dark avenue, and across the road to his own house. Under the arch at the door, Colonel Ward shook hands with him and muttered a few words.

‘My best wishes, my boy. God bless you !’

Paul went back to Red Towers, and walked restlessly about for another hour in the moonlight. He felt as if he must go to Woolsborough to-morrow ; it seemed very hard of Mrs. Percival to put him off for a week. It was easier to live without Celia in Switzerland than here, with only a few hours’ railway between them.

The owls in the wood seemed very restless, too ; they hooted dismally now and then, as if to condole with their young Squire on the cruelty of circumstances.



## CHAPTER III.

### RIVER GATE.

CANON PERCIVAL, in his own line, was a much cleverer and wiser man than Colonel Ward pretended to think him.

He was by no means a fool : he had a remarkable faculty for sticking to his point and having his own way. He had done everything he wanted to do in life, so far. His college was reasonably proud of him, and had given him one of its best livings, St. Martha's, in the city of Woolsborough ; a canonry in the Cathedral had followed. He had married early in life, carrying off a

prize whom two at least of his friends envied him. He had pleasant manners, and managed his curates and his parish very well ; he was also very friendly with his brethren of the Chapter. Some evil-disposed people laughed at him, though he was a good-looking, dignified man ; perhaps because he was a little too dignified sometimes, and they said he was ambitious, and wanted to be a bishop. There were also people who disliked and distrusted him ; no one, perhaps, liked him heartily ; and yet no one had anything really to say against him.

He was not a rich man ; but he was careful and prudent, and managed to live very comfortably in his beautiful old house close to the Cathedral. Everyone liked Mrs. Percival, and was charmed to go to her parties, which had been made more attractive than usual this summer by the presence

of her soldier son from India, and her pretty niece, Miss Darrell.

River Gate was a large square red house at the south-west corner of the Close. Its tall stately door and rows of windows looked north, fronting rows of elms and the Chapter-house, and then the Cathedral. To the west and south of the house, a fine old garden in terraces sloped down to the broad river, which was the charm and life of Woolsborough. Under the lowest terrace of the garden was an ancient archway, crumbled by time and overgrown with ivy, where one could turn in from the towing-path and mount up by steps into the Close, and so on, by narrow walled ways, past fragments of old towers and defences, to the west front of the Cathedral. This river gate, which gave its name to Canon Percival's house, was also a private way, by



a flight of steps with a locked gate, from his garden to the river.

Mrs. Percival was alone in her drawing-room on Saturday afternoon. Outside, on the high gravel terrace with its red flower-pots, the sun was shining with a soft September brilliancy ; but the three tall west windows were darkened, so that there was a deep restful shade in the room. There was also a delightful scent of flowers, and a great deal of varied colour, for which Mrs. Percival had such a fancy that the Canon had been heard to remark, ‘This room is scarcely ecclesiastical.’ There were several little dogs, and a tea-table, and a slight general confusion, as if people had been there not long ago. And this was the case, for some visitors had just gone away with Canon Percival into the Cathedral ; their large carriage was still driving round and round the Close.

Mrs. Percival appeared to be a little uneasy in her mind, and disturbed from her usual amiability. She snubbed the little dogs when they begged of her, and told them they were greedy. She walked round the room, pushed the chairs about, went out on the terrace, listened, and tried to look up the river; but trees and walls and houses prevented her seeing much.

‘I wonder if I have done right,’ she muttered to herself, taking a quick turn along the terrace; ‘but knowing Vincent so well, poor dear—I wonder if I ought to have put him off till Monday. He is sure to come now—still, the train must be late. Good gracious, here he is!’

With both hands stretched out, and the sweetest smile, and all the pretty grace that belonged to her, she hurried back into the drawing-room to receive Paul Romaine.

‘Here you are, my dear ! I had almost given you up. So glad to see you ! How well you are looking !’

Paul was glancing quickly round the room, the dear old room, bright and sweet as ever. Red Towers was certainly dismal by contrast. But where was his own particular possession, who was going to make Red Towers the most brilliant place in the world ?

‘Thanks so much ! Where’s Celia ?’ he said, smiling and half shy.

‘Yes, of course she ought to have been here to meet you. Try not to be impatient ; she will be in very soon. Sit down and have some tea.’

‘Could I find her ?’ said Paul.

He had been unreasonable, no doubt ; but somehow he had expected to see Celia on the platform at the railway-station ; and

when she was not there, he made sure that she would be under the archway at the entrance of the Close ; and then he had told himself, ‘No, she wouldn’t like that ; she will be here in the hall ;’ but no one received him in the hall. Even the drawing-room was empty, till, after the first instant, Mrs. Percival came in. And he had not seen Celia since the end of June, when he went abroad, immediately after his engagement.

Paul had been patient enough : he had allowed Mrs. Percival to put him off on one excuse or another, untroubled by doubts. The time was to come which would make amends for everything ; and now it was come, and had brought nothing but disappointment. Paul took no notice of the little dogs who were jumping upon him, or of Mrs. Percival’s kind advice and offer of tea. He walked across to the window.

‘Is she anywhere in the garden?’ he said.

There was a certain sacred spot in the garden, where one evening, more than two months ago, Celia had let him worship her. Everyone else was very proud of his University honours; but she only smiled, and looked at him with a shade more interest than before. He had known well enough that these things made no difference to her; but still he had worked with all his strength, partly from natural love of the work, partly to make himself in his own eyes more worthy of her. Some people said that Celia flirted; but she had never flirted with him. Her manner was even cold. Whatever Colonel Ward may have thought, Paul had not had much of what is commonly called encouragement. Perhaps she knew that a look, a smile, a word now and then, were enough to

keep Paul where she chose him to be ; and, if so, she was a wise girl not to give him any more. Anyhow, when he could be kept within due bounds no longer, she let him speak, and smiled in earnest, and very sweetly accepted him, and Red Towers, and all the rest of it.

Mrs. Percival was of course immensely pleased. She had a great respect for Celia's talents, and thought she would make a very good wife for Paul. For Celia herself, what could be more desirable? One may fear that Colonel Ward's notion of anything dishonourable in the arrangement never even occurred to Mrs. Percival's mind ; and yet she was not quite at ease. She was troubled, at first, by three anxieties : that their summer at Woolsborough would be quite spoilt by tiresome gossip, curiosity, and congratulations (Celia disliked this prospect as much

as she did) ; that her son Vincent, who did not like Paul, and scoffed at him, and was very meddlesome, would in some way spoil the whole thing if he knew it ; that Celia had engaged herself to Paul without caring for him in the least. For Mrs. Percival, though she might be worldly and calculating, was soft-hearted too, and sincerely fond of Paul.

The two first anxieties were disposed of by Celia's wise resolution that no one but her uncle and aunt should know of her engagement till they left Woolsborough in the autumn. As to the third—when her aunt murmured a few caressing words on the subject, she answered calmly :

‘ Oh, Paul is a dear boy. I always love boys.’

‘ Will he find that satisfying ?’ suggested Mrs. Percival, lifting her eyebrows with a faint, dismayed smile.

‘Don’t be anxious about him; he is quite happy,’ said Celia; and she added after a moment, ‘If I wait to marry till I am in love, dear, I shall never marry at all. I don’t know what it is. I haven’t got it in me.’

‘Oh, Celia!’

Mrs. Percival smiled a little more, and ceased her remonstrances.

But since then, throughout the summer months, she had often been visited by troublesome thoughts, doubting whether it would not have been the best policy, after all, to tell the whole truth at once—to the Bishop, the Chapter, the county, the city, the household—and more especially to Captain Percival, her son. He—his long idle hours passed perpetually with Celia, intimate, friendly, admiring—was, in fact, his mother’s one great towering anxiety.



Words of warning had been on her lips several times, and then the truth would certainly have slipped out ; but then she remembered Celia's cool worldly wisdom, and Vincent's expressed conviction that in these days a man must marry money, or not at all ; and the Canon, when she hinted something to him, asked her, smiling, whether either of these young people was a fool ; and so she kept to her intention, and now, in September, Celia's engagement to Paul Romaine was still a secret. Only Mrs. Percival wished in her heart that she could have kept Paul, for his own sake, away from Woolsborough a few days longer.

She looked at him anxiously as he moved restlessly to the window. In old days she had always been able to manage Paul : his affectionate, unsuspecting nature had given her no trouble ; but this sudden chill of dis-

appointment, this eager pain, which made him turn away suddenly from her now, seemed for a moment almost beyond her diplomatic powers. She felt angry with Celia, who had known quite well what time Paul was coming. But perhaps it was Vincent's fault. She wished that they had not gone out together on this particular afternoon. But Vincent was going away on Monday, and would have been dreadfully injured if his cousin had thought it necessary to stay at home to-day.

‘I am very sorry Celia is not in, Paul,’ said Mrs. Percival in her sweetest tones. ‘I know she meant to be here. But Vincent wanted her to go out in the boat with him—he leaves us on Monday—and as he knows nothing, you see, it may have been a little difficult to bring him back in time. You mustn’t be angry with Celia.’

‘Angry ! Nothing of the sort,’ said Paul. He laughed, and came back to the table, and quietly took his cup of tea from Mrs. Percival, who looked up smiling into his eyes. ‘I rather wish everybody had known about it from the first,’ he said.

‘Do you ?’ she answered. ‘But it would not have made much difference to you, dear boy, as you were away all the time. And we had our little reasons, you know. But now, after next week, of course everybody may be told. We think of moving to Holm in about a week’s time.’

‘May I stay here till then ?’ asked Paul.

‘Of course. I thought you would. And now tell me about Switzerland.’

‘There’s nothing to tell you, except that it was very jolly.’

‘And what have you been doing since you came home ?’

‘Shooting. There are really a great lot of birds this year. The Colonel and I have had some capital sport.’

‘The Canon will be glad to hear that,’ said Mrs. Percival. ‘And how is the dear old Colonel? So you told him our news—and how did he take it? Was he the least bit hurt that you had not told him before?’

‘Well, perhaps he was,’ Paul confessed.

He looked on the floor, slightly confused, for certainly he could not tell Mrs. Percival how Colonel Ward took the news.

‘I was afraid of that,’ said she. ‘He is a little touchy, poor dear!’

‘He soon got over it,’ said Paul. ‘He thinks it’s a good thing that Celia knows more about horses than I do. And I was talking over servants and things with him, you know—and he thinks it won’t do to keep the Sabins.’

‘Why?’ said Mrs. Percival with her pretty laugh. ‘Does he think Celia will want a dozen powdered footmen? Old bachelors are not the best judges, are they? But there will be plenty of time to settle all that; you need not bother yourself about changes just yet. In fact, if I were you, I would begin quietly—because you are not making a great match, you know, Paul.’

‘I think I am,’ he said in a low voice.

He always felt very stupid when a pretty speech seemed to be demanded of him, and generally rushed on to something else as fast as possible.

‘When do you think she will let it be, Mrs. Percival?’ he asked.

‘You must ask her. But you are both so young that there need be no hurry.’

‘I hate waiting,’ said Paul. ‘What is

the use of dragging through miserable days without any reason? It's a waste out of one's life—don't you know it is?

‘Well, no. I must say I was very happy and comfortable when I was engaged. Arthur, to be sure, was just as ridiculous as you are now. But then he had some reason for it, because I was not such a good steady girl as your Celia.’

‘Ah, I know,’ said Paul, smiling as he looked at her. ‘The Colonel has never got over it.’

Mrs. Percival smiled too, looking quite conscious and pretty and young, though she was past fifty. Her hair was brown still, frizzed and curled under a most becoming cap; her complexion was soft and white; she had lovely hands; and her brown eyes had a way of smiling and shining which to this day was irresistible.

‘Poor dear ! I do wish he had married somebody,’ she said. ‘And yet I don’t know ; he is very happy in that nice little house of yours. By-the-bye, you must always go on asking his advice, Paul, or he will be injured.’

‘Trust me for that. Besides, I should be a fool if I didn’t ; he knows such a lot of things.’

‘Yes, so he does. And he is as good as gold, dear old fellow ! I wonder now, Paul, whether he means to leave you his money.’

‘His money ? Colonel Ward ? I never thought about it,’ said Paul vaguely. ‘Has he got any ? Not much, I should think.’

‘His uncle left him at least three or four thousand a year,’ said Mrs. Percival. ‘Do you mean to say you didn’t know that ? Of course he has lived all these years on three or four hundred.’

‘Really ! Well, I never thought about it,’ repeated Paul. ‘Leave it to me ? Of course not. Why should he ?’

‘He has no relations ; and I believe he likes you better than anybody else.’

‘Except you. You are his favourite person in the world. I don’t believe you could do anything the Colonel would think wrong, strict as he is. It’s beautiful, you know, the way he talks about you, and the way he looks when one mentions your name.’

They went on talking about Colonel Ward for some minutes, till the Canon came in with his rather grand air of welcome. After a few speeches to Paul, he began talking to his wife about the visitors who had just driven away ; and then Paul, leaving them together, went out into the garden, and ran down to the lower terrace, and out under



the old gateway to the towing-path, to watch for Celia.

It was a still, oppressive evening. Away across the deep green meadows, beyond the river, the sun was going down into a bank of cloud and fog, all suffused with a red light, which made the slow broad current glow with a sort of burnished splendour. Blue evening mists were beginning to hover about the river, and to creep up the steep old irregular streets that wound down to the quay, between the Cathedral and all its buildings, and the bridge a few hundred yards above. There were boats about the bridge, and children playing and screaming, and the river came sweeping down under the three wide arches, but Paul did not see the boat he was looking for. After all, he did not know whether Vincent Percival had taken his cousin up or down the river ;

Mrs. Percival could not tell him. So he looked up towards the bridge, and saw nothing ; and turned round, and walked a little way in the other direction, towards a distance of willow-trees and far-stretching meadows, with houses and gardens here and there, the southern outskirts of the town. No boat, no Celia : the sun was almost obscured now, glimmering, a dim red ball, in the midst of the clouds, and the mists were gathering over the water. It was almost twilight ; and still Paul paced up and down the towing-path, under the old river gate and the dark half-ruined walls with their heavy tresses of ivy. It struck him that he might go up to the bridge, to the man who had charge of the boats there ; he would know if they had passed ; and then it would be very possible to take a canoe, and go to meet them. But some mysterious

instinct said : ‘ Celia would not like that ;’  
and so he stayed where he was, loitering  
about the archway, straining his eyes one  
way or the other, as the minutes dragged  
on and the twilight deepened.





## CHAPTER IV.

### CELIA.

CELIA DARRELL was a woman of a happy disposition. She was always amused ; as they say, all was fish that came to her net. She was, indeed, a delightful girl, with excellent health, high animal spirits, and a great love of admiration, or rather of being liked ; for, with all her beauty, she was not vain. And everybody did like her, women as much as men, except a few prejudiced, old-fashioned souls like Colonel Ward.

How could the world help liking anyone with such pretty manners, always ready to

join in any fun, enjoying the dullest party, and being kind to the stupidest people! A woman like Celia need never fear that she will not be liked. The only danger is—but that will not matter to her—that some rash creatures may allow themselves to like her too much, to trust her too far, and then find out, with more or less pain, how very little worth is love or friendship from a character like hers.

But it was most natural that people who loved Celia should idealize her, for her sweetness and charm were very real. If they sometimes bestowed themselves in the wrong place, who can be perfect! If, when the man to whom she was engaged arrived hot and tired from his journey, with no thought in his mind but that of seeing her again, of finding her waiting for him, she was lingering over her tea in perfect peace in the

garden of an old inn, three or four miles up the river, laughing with her cousin Vincent as if she had no interest in the world but him—well, perhaps, this only showed her perfect confidence in herself and Paul, and her splendid power of keeping a secret.

The old Queen's Head was a long white building, with a brown porch all overgrown with purple clematis, standing high on the river's bank. Boating people often stopped there ; one mounted up to it by flights of red brick steps in the garden, which was all brilliant on this autumn day with dahlias and nasturtiums and clove pinks—a varied mass of deep-coloured flowers. Half-way up, off the steps, there was a little quaint wooden summer-house, very clean and shady, with a peaked top and a weather-cock.

The smiling girl of the inn had brought

down tea there for Vincent and his cousin, by no means for the first time that summer. Their boat was lying at the foot of the green steep slope below the steps ; swallows were twittering and gathering in rows on the roof of the old inn ; the shadows grew long very early now, and the dewy nights were cold ; they were no doubt talking of their near departure, which seemed to trouble them much more than Vincent's troubled him.

There was something by no means pleasant or contented, however, in Captain Percival's face, as he sat there and looked at his smiling cousin. He was what people call a handsome man ; from his looks he might have been a hero, but he was not a hero. He was a very practical man ; he knew excellently well how to enjoy himself, and how to make himself agreeable to other

people, if he wished it ; but he did not know how to smile, and had never yet been known to deny himself anything for anybody. After all this, one is inclined to say that he and his cousin Celia were not badly matched. Perhaps he might have thought so himself, for different reasons, if the course of the world had been different. Celia had been a delightful companion all through these summer weeks ; she had made River Gate and the dull old society of Close and neighbourhood quite endurable. They had chaffed each other from morning till night, and he had let her drag him about where she pleased, pretending to be very lazy and unwilling to move.

Mrs. Percival had been grateful to Celia, till she began to be anxious, for Vincent was a difficult person at home, very hard to please, and giving himself the tremendous



airs that Colonel Ward complained of. He was only in England for six months at this time, and Paul had seen him at Easter, when they naturally found nothing at all to say to each other. When Paul came down from Oxford after taking his degree, Vincent happened to be away, so that Paul had those few glorious days, which ended with his engagement to Celia. And Paul believed that Celia loved him : and he went abroad, because they all told him he had better, and lived on her not very satisfying letters all the summer, and believed, and trusted. Well, after all, Celia had no idea of deceiving him.

She quite meant to marry him by-and-by, and to enjoy life with plenty of money ; at present she was enjoying her tea, and the warm sweet air of the old garden, and the lovely lights on the water, and her jokes

with Vincent, though he was hardly so agreeable as usual that afternoon. Her clear pale skin was burnt a little by the sun, but the colour was becoming ; it suited the fair hair, with a tinge of reddish gold, that curled under the brim of her sailor hat. Her eyes were very pretty, cloudy blue grey, with dark lashes ; they could be very cold and indifferent, and then they were only grey ; but with any excitement they became blue, and wonderfully expressive. They could smile quite distractingly, while the rest of her face was still ; they were smiling now, as she looked at Vincent, and she had altogether what he amused himself by calling her ‘electric look.’

Vincent had all along said anything in the world he pleased to this pretty plaything of a cousin : lately he had been a little angry at finding out how much he really admired

her ; but this was such hopeless nonsense that he kept it quite to himself, and meant to go on with their easy chaffing intimacy to the end.

‘ Don’t look so cross,’ said Celia in her soft voice. ‘ Is the tea too bad ? or are the midges beginning to bite you—or is there anything dreadfully wrong with my hat ?’

One of Celia’s advantages over other people was her way of speaking, clear, deliberate, and slow. It was impossible to ignore what she said. Her voice was musical, though she knew nothing of music ; a little high-pitched, and plaintive ; her enemies said it was an affected voice.

‘ Nothing wrong with your hat ; it’s a very pretty hat,’ said Captain Percival. ‘ Of course the tea is beastly, and so are the midges. They will be worse on the water ; but you can pull, and I can smoke.’

‘They never bite me,’ said Celia, looking at her hands.

‘Nothing ever bites you, I should think,’ said her cousin. ‘And you are never ill, are you? never even a finger-ache. I suspect you don’t know what pain means.’

‘That would be saying a little too much, perhaps. I used to tumble down and hurt myself, when I was a small child. But I have never been ill. I suppose I don’t really know what pain means. Do you mind? Very sorry, but it’s not my fault.’

‘The worst of people like you is,’ said Vincent rather viciously, ‘that they can’t feel for anybody else. Nothing makes any impression upon them.’

‘You are quite mistaken. I’m not so heartless. I think it is very horrid of the midges to bite you.’

Vincent twisted his moustache, looking rather crosser than before.

‘I’m not chaffing,’ he said, ‘I’m serious, do you know. I believe you have no more feeling than a stone. Did anything ever happen in your life to make you unhappy? Did you ever stay awake at night, or not eat your dinner, because you were unhappy?’

Celia gazed at him, her eyes growing more and more blue, and smiling more than ever. There was wonder in the smile, for she perceived that he was in earnest. For the first time in that long summer flirtation, their talk was going a little below the surface. It was not her doing.

‘Why do you ask me such absurd questions?’ she said. ‘And why do you think I have no more feeling than a stone? Do you know, I am very glad you are not generally serious.’

Vincent made no reply at once. He was not looking at her now, but away towards the river.

‘Now do something to please me,’ she said, after a moment of really uncomfortable silence. ‘Wait till we get home, and then be serious with Uncle Tom in the study. Or wait till to-morrow ; that will be better still ; to-morrow is Sunday. Will you, Vincent ?’

After a minute he answered, rather roughly and suddenly, ‘I don’t know whether you are a witch, or a baby.’

‘Give me the benefit of the doubt,’ said Celia, half under her breath.

Vincent’s manner was really puzzling. She had very often seen him out of temper ; the usual calm of River Gate was seriously disturbed now and then by his unreasonable-nesses ; but these bursts of rage were generally concerned with his dinner, or his clothes,

or mistakes of servants, or fancied insults and neglects from his devoted father and mother. Celia had never been the object of them herself, and had always succeeded in bringing peace back directly. She could not imagine why he should be cross now, or what she had done to injure his feelings. Perhaps she had a right to be injured at his asking her whether she had ever been unhappy : the touches of black on her white dress might have kept him from forgetting that a year had not long passed since her father died ; and if she had never loved any one else, she had loved her father.

There were few enough moments in Celia's life when she had any deep feeling, either of joy or sorrow ; and still fewer were the moments when such a feeling found its way into words. In fact, she was harder and cooler than most young women of her age

and kind ; and yet she did not like Vincent to call her a stone. But she did not contradict him any further at that time, and seemed to deserve the character he gave her. To her quick instincts, after the first surprise, his unusual earnestness was a danger signal, and she had no wish to find herself among any troublesome rocks. So far, she had sailed with him over a smooth sea ; for every reason, she wished their present terms of easy cousinship to continue to the end ; and indeed, so did he ; but he was a little off his guard that afternoon, and man is not always master of his fate.

For a few minutes they sat in silence : a most extraordinary thing for them. Vincent was still staring away up the river, frowning fiercely. Celia, having slowly lowered her eyes from his handsome, sulky face, played a little tune on the table, and tried to look



grave too. The state of things both bored and amused her ; she was also conscious of an odd little excitement, which made her heart beat rather faster than usual. Celia was nothing if not practical ; she was never afraid to face facts, or their consequences either.

‘ He and I in love with each other ! What an awful business ! Oh, nonsense ; how can he be such a fool !’

This thought flashed through her mind, while her fingers tapped the table impatiently. Glancing up again for an instant, she knew that life would have been a different thing if such a man as Vincent had been in Paul’s place. The thought was not quite new ; she had crushed it down before, as she crushed it now, at once and without pity ; but to-day there was this to be said in excuse for it : Vincent had never before given it a right to exist.

‘Isn’t it time to go?’ she said presently, in her gentlest, coolest manner. ‘Those dear things will be getting anxious about us.’

‘Sick of it, are you? So am I,’ said Vincent savagely, as he met her blue eyes looking at him in a sort of sweet mockery. ‘The sooner it’s over the better. This sort of thing is unbearable, you know.’

‘Weak tea, and midges that bite one’s nose,’ said Celia. ‘No, I agree with you; the sooner it’s over the better. Only do try not to be so cross about it. Remember, it is our last afternoon, except Sunday, which doesn’t count for much. Next Saturday you will be ever so far away.’

‘And much difference that will make to you. You will sleep just the same on Monday night, and laugh and play tennis with some fools all day on Tuesday, and never—well, never give me another thought, after

all these weeks we have had together. And now you tell me not to be serious. It's the truth, Celia—I was thinking just now—in spite of all our jolly time together, you wouldn't care one straw if you heard I was dead.'

So Celia found herself among the rocks in earnest ; but her power of steering was still equal to the occasion. She answered him very quietly.

'Please don't say what is not true. I shall miss you very much ; but is that a reason why I should make you and myself unhappy by being dismal beforehand ?'

At the same time she knew that Vincent was right in his forebodings of her behaviour next week, only—poor Vincent—with the addition of Paul. His last bitter words, 'You wouldn't care one straw if you heard I was dead,' she could have answered effectively

in certain lines from 'Chastelard,' which had been copied out for her once upon a time by a friend who knew her well, and loved her with a romantic girl's love in spite of it.

'Nay, dear, I have  
No tears in me ; I never shall weep much,  
I think, in all my life ; I have wept for wrath  
Sometimes, and for mere pain, but for love's pity  
I cannot weep at all. I would to God  
You loved me less ; I give you all I can  
For all this love of yours, and yet I am sure  
I shall live out the sorrow of your death  
And be glad afterwards.'

But Celia was not at all inclined now to run into any poetical exaggerations, or to think of the future, even the near future of next week. The present, with its sudden and strange developments, was quite enough to occupy her. She was no longer amused now, but vexed and astonished. Vincent had changed so unaccountably, while she had not changed at all : it was really most provoking.

She had believed both him and herself out of reach of violent feelings of any sort. She saw no reason why their summer should not end as pleasantly as it had begun ; to her his reproaches would have been absolutely laughable, if they had not been unspeakably tiresome, and had not brought with them, like an echo, the slightest sting of regret, the faintest shiver, making her fancy for a moment that she herself was as foolish as Vincent, and that a sort of dark curtain was drawing down over her world, flowery garden and stealing river, because he was going away.

But she was only weak for a moment, and proceeded to behave with all the calm good sense for which her aunt gave her credit. She looked up at him again, this time leaving all mockery and chaff out of the question.

‘Don’t be silly,’ she said, ‘and don’t be unjust.’

‘I beg your pardon, Celia,’ he said, brought back suddenly to reason by a stronger nature than his own; and then she laughed a little, and he smiled rather queerly.

‘I had better go and pay for this tea,’ he said. ‘We may as well start: it will be getting foggy.’

‘Very well,’ said Celia; and while he went off up to the house, she strolled down to the boat, stopping on the old red-brick steps to gather clove pinks, almost black in the shadow, but richer scented than ever after the sunny day.

There she stood, looking into the water till Vincent came, wishing a little, too late, that he knew of her engagement. As for telling him, she did not feel inclined to do

anything so disagreeable, especially as Paul was now at Woolsborough. She was sorry now that she had not told him to stay away till Monday ; not that she could not keep him in perfect order ; but Vincent's newly-discovered feelings would make his eyes unnaturally sharp, she knew, and a scene before he went was a thing very much to be avoided.

She took the sculls on the way down, and he sat in the stern, and smoked cigarettes, and watched her as she rowed. The autumn afternoon was already growing misty and dim ; those mounting clouds, which Paul saw from the towing-path at Woolsborough, were slowly climbing in the west ; the red suffused light of the sun as he descended made the broad calm river glow like polished copper. There was no sound but a faint splash against the bank here and there ; a

ripple about a fallen tree, showing how fast that silent current ran ; or the rising of a fish suddenly. Vincent and Celia started on their last little voyage in silence, but she put out all her young strength, and the boat went flying down the stream. She rowed as if she was anxious to bring this chapter in her story to an end. At first Vincent did not interfere, but he very soon began to show that this wish was not his.

‘Easy now,’ he said. ‘What’s the use of a pace like that ? The stream will take us down quite soon enough.’

‘I don’t think so, do you know,’ she answered. ‘It will be nearly dark when we get home, and Aunt Flo will be anxious about us.’

‘Celia, how false you are !’

‘Vincent, you are very disagreeable.’

‘No,’ he said gravely. ‘I can’t go on



chaffing for ever, like you, but I am never disagreeable. I'm in earnest, and I'm unselfish, which is an awful thing to have to be. Some people can do that sort of thing cheerfully, but I can't. They are either cold-blooded, like fish, or else they are saints. I am neither one nor the other.'

'You are very mysterious,' said Celia, pulling a little harder than before. 'I never suspected you of being a saint, but then—I didn't even know you were unselfish.'

'I don't suppose you did. That is your coldness. As cold as a fish, as hard as a stone——'

'What a character!' she said, with a little laugh. 'False, cold, hard. It is a pity you have found out all that. We might as well have parted friends.'

'Look here. Change places with me.'

'No, thanks. I would rather stay here.'

‘If you don’t, I shall upset the boat,’ said Vincent quietly.

She hesitated a moment. On any afternoon before she would have dared him to do it ; but to-day his temper seemed a little dangerous, and she did not even care to provoke a dispute with him. After all, what did it matter ? Celia had one great secret of success in life. She could see the relative importance of things. She had no small humours and obstinacies, and knew when she had better give in. On this occasion, the change would only mean getting home rather later ; nobody would be angry, and nobody, except Paul, would be anxious. So they changed places, and Vincent almost immediately shipped his oars and lighted another cigarette. Celia settled herself very comfortably among her cushions in the stern, and wrapped a warm

shawl round her shoulders. They went on drifting slowly down the stream. Damp mists were gathering; the red glow was becoming still more lurid and dim.

‘So you did not know I was unselfish?’ said Vincent presently.

‘I really don’t believe I ever thought about it,’ Celia answered languidly.

She was half angry with him, and in her heart she said, with quite human impatience: ‘What a bore you are!’ But the voice that spoke, in its utter sweetness, coldness, and indifference, might have belonged to the classic nymph who reigns over that river, and might have warned a daring mortal to venture no farther. If Celia had spoken like that to Paul Romaine, nothing more would have been heard of him or his pretensions; but Captain Percival was not so sensitive.

‘After all,’ he began, ‘Celia—don’t you think we may as well understand each other before I go away?’

‘About your unselfishness, do you mean?’ said his cousin, in the same languid tone.

If she could still keep off the evil moment she would; and yet with her vexation a little feeling of triumph mixed itself. That Vincent—selfish, worldly, mercenary (but she only called it prudent) with his faultless taste, and his tremendous admiration for himself—should be reduced to making love to his penniless cousin, and breaking all his fine resolves to leave England a free man unless ten thousand a year happened to fall at his feet—it was too funny really. Celia was sorry, of course; but she was not altogether displeased. Imagine the feelings of Aunt Flo and Uncle Tom; could they

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ever have suspected their magnificent son of such an aberration !

It would have been better, after all, to spoil the fun of the summer by letting the world and Vincent know of her stupid engagement. Must she tell him now ? No, she could not. There were plenty of obstacles without that. She must write to him next week, or make Aunt Flo write for her ; a letter might catch him at Gibraltar. But even now, in spite of his strange talk, she could hardly believe that Vincent absolutely meant to ask her to marry him. If so, it was a pity indeed that the thing was impossible ; for though she was not actually in love with Vincent, any more than with Paul, she admired Vincent more than any man she had ever seen.

‘ Yes, about my unselfishness, if you like

to put it in that way,' he said. 'I want you to understand that. There's nothing else in the way, that I know of. Don't you know what I should do if I was selfish, Celia?'

'Riddles are far too much trouble,' she said. 'As you are not selfish, and can't do it, why should I bother myself to guess?'

'Very true,' said Vincent. 'I should ask you to marry me.'

To this Celia made no answer at all.

'You have made a conquest you see, dear,' her cousin went on. 'Well, we both know it is no use thinking of it. The Canon does not see his way to making me a larger allowance, and a man can't very easily alter his tastes, or his way of living. You would hate poverty just as much as I should; in fact, I could not expose you to it. Now,

Celia, perhaps you understand that going away is something of a grind.'

A long silence followed. The light was fading fast now, and the wooded banks loomed dark above the water. Vincent seemed to feel that he must do something ; he unshipped the sculls again, and began rowing gently. He looked at Celia, sitting dark and muffled in the stern ; her face was turned away from him, a little towards the bank, and looked very pale.

'Can't you say anything, Celia ?' he said at last. 'Of course it is for my own misery that I love you. I didn't mean to tell you—but it could not be helped.'

'Why did you tell me ? I don't quite know,' she said. 'What do you want me to say ? I can only say I am very sorry.'

'You see what I mean, don't you ? You think it is impossible ?'

‘Perfectly impossible.’ She was going to add—‘for more reasons than one,’ but she stopped herself, fearing to bring on worse explanations.

At the same time, Vincent’s words, and the tone of his voice, gave her more intense pain than she had thought possible, and she was angry with herself and with the pain. But it only made her own voice colder and harder when she spoke again.

‘I cannot imagine why you told me. What could be the use of it?’

‘It did seem useless,’ Vincent confessed ; ‘but put yourself in my place, and you won’t wonder so much. Going away for years, and leaving you, and not knowing what might happen ; and then the thought that somebody else might turn up—of course he will ; and Celia, am I going beyond the truth when I say that you like me better



than the rest of the world ? in fact, that both you and I are never so happy as when we are together. You will miss me, I know, though of course not so much as I shall miss you.'

'Have you forgotten that I am hard, and cold, and false ?' said Celia ; 'or that I am to play tennis and enjoy myself more than ever next week, when you are gone away ?'

'Nonsense ! I only said all that because you provoked me, and I wanted to see what you would say. Now listen. We can't know anything about the future, hang it ! but, dear, will you be engaged to me ? and some day I shall get an appointment that I can marry on, or I shall leave the service and go into trade, or something. Anything, so that we shall belong to each other. Will you, darling ?'

In spite of all Celia's common sense, for a

minute or two she wavered terribly. It was a good thing that Vincent could not see what she was thinking of, or know what a thrill of pleasure his words sent through her whole nature, strong and cool as it was. It was a good thing, too, that they were in a boat, where he could not behave unreasonably. In the few moments before she spoke Celia reviewed the pros and cons in her mind. This was a man she could love—but he would soon cease to love her. She knew him too well to deceive herself about that. Poverty, discontent, repentance, to follow on a little romance unnatural to both of them. While Paul Romaine and Red Towers would be always the same, always her own, and life would be what she chose to make it.

‘I would not be so unkind to you, Vincent,’ she said. ‘No ; please say no more about it. Your father and mother would be awfully

vexed, and it would be ruin to you. I am not unselfish, don't think so. You are rather mistaken about me—at least, you were more right in what you said before. I am a very cold person, I dare say. Anyhow, I couldn't do this. And you have astonished me so utterly, that I feel sure it is not my fault.'

After that the boat flew down the river again, and was soon passing by old red houses and gardens full of fruit-trees, and then flashed with dangerous speed under the railway-bridge, and over many broken reflections of the lights of the town, and then under the other bridge where the boats were, and up at last to the landing-place at River Gate. There, in the dark, Paul was standing, and Celia, who had steered through the last half hour in some fear of her life, caught both his hands so joyfully that he was

repaid for his waiting. She laughed and talked excitedly as she walked up through the garden. Paul too was in the highest spirits ; but they did not let out their secret to Vincent, who followed them silently.





## CHAPTER V.

### CELIA'S LOVER.

THERE was a small dinner-party at River Gate that evening. It was not a very happy evening to any one concerned, except, perhaps, to the Canon, who liked giving dinner-parties. Mrs. Percival was painfully aware that her son Vincent had come back from his boating in a very bad temper. At first she suspected that this must be because of Paul, and that the secret of the engagement had leaked out somehow. But she soon perceived that Vincent and Paul were

quite as little interested in each other as they had been at Easter. They were both watching Celia, to be sure : Vincent silently and sulkily ; Paul silently and sadly : he had not yet had a chance of speaking to her alone, and thought this party a real piece of barbarity. He supposed they thought that he was made of patience. Then his meditations took the form of an admiration of Celia, that grew more ecstatic every moment. How wonderfully good she was ! How unselfish ! how kind ! How prettily she talked to the old men ! how sweetly she amused the old ladies ! how amiably she listened to that awful ass young Jackson, the new Minor Canon, and even played his accompaniment while he sang a song full of ‘ Darling ’—the horrid fool !—looking at her all the time. It bored her to tears, that was plain ; for she got up instantly, hardly wait-

ing to be thanked by the hopeless idiot, whom she left standing by the piano, and came straight down the room, and stopped where Paul was planted behind a table. It was covered with some of Mrs. Percival's most precious curiosities, which he had been carefully examining one by one. Celia lingered a moment by the table, and looked up at him, smiling. He little knew what his lady-love really was, or the trouble in her heart just then, and he looked at her as if he cared to know nothing but his own love, and pride, and delight in her.

‘It isn't all for money,’ thought the strange girl, trying to explain herself a little. ‘He is such a dear fellow. But he has stolen his eyes from some woman. His mother must have been lovely.’

It seemed to her that she had forgotten Paul's face in the weeks he had been away,

and had only remembered his other possessions.

‘I shall be very happy,’ she thought, while he looked at her. ‘I wish this horrid worry had never happened.’

‘What are you doing all alone here?’ she said to him softly. ‘Why don’t you sing, or play, or something? Do—just to show that poor little man what singing is.’

But a triumph over Mr. Jackson seemed to Paul quite unnecessary. Unlike many musical people, he was generous about other people’s music.

‘He’s not so bad—except in his style of songs,’ he said.

‘And I dared to play before you—I, who can’t play two right notes. Poor thing, how you must have suffered! Why didn’t you come and do it for me?’



‘Next time I will, if it’s Jackson,’ said Paul ; and Celia laughed.

‘Do go and talk to Mrs. Archdeacon,’ she said, and was moving away, but he stopped her.

‘I have a hundred things to say. Will you come out into the garden to-night, when they are all gone? There is a moon—just for a few minutes,’ he added quickly, for it was easy to see that she did not mean to say yes.

A sort of pained anxiety seemed to put out the light in his face.

‘Am I never to have a chance of speaking to you?’ he said in a whisper, leaning on the table, while she turned half away.

‘Oh, don’t *you* be unreasonable,’ she said, with an emphasis he did not understand. ‘You must trust me—I thought you did.’

‘I would trust you with my soul.’

‘Then don’t bother about the garden,’ said Celia lightly ; but her look and smile were quite reassuring, and scattered his troubles at once to the wind.

After all, he did not know what they were. The engagement was still a secret ; therefore Celia was of course quite right. Some girls would have defied the chance of being found out ; the talk of servants ; possibly the prowlings of that odious Vincent. His noble Celia was too wise for that. She had left him now, and was laughing with the Archdeacon over the cartoon in *Punch*. The light fell on her fair bright head, and flashed in little sparkles on the shiny ornaments of her black dress, which made her pretty arms and neck look even whiter than usual. Her eyes smiled on everyone ; but so unaffected and unconscious was she in her happiness, that no one could have guessed

she knew how desperately two men in the room were in love with her. The Archdeacon certainly thought himself her chief admirer, though he half suspected a rival in young Jackson. That youth, evidently, was not good enough for her, and he himself was married. However, there was no harm in spinning out the interest of *Punch* as long as possible. Meanwhile, Paul, a little shamed by the unselfishness of his love, left the table of *objets d'art* and went to talk to Mrs. Archdeacon, who received him kindly, and asked questions about Switzerland.

Poor Paul! Celia might well ask him to trust her, for altogether she treated him very badly that first evening of his return. She wished him good-night before everybody and went upstairs with her aunt. And then his disappointments were not quite over, for when he wandered out, in a very sentimental

frame of mind, to the moonlit terrace under her window, he found that some one was there before him—Vincent, sitting in a garden-chair, smoking. Considering that the night was by no means a summer night, and that Vincent was a shivery Indian, Paul thought this the most ridiculous sight he had ever seen. Perhaps Vincent suspected something, and did not think the match good enough for his cousin ; besides, it was plain enough that he did not like him. Anyhow, there would be no peace or freedom till Vincent was gone. Paul walked quietly away, giving up his hour on the terrace. But thinking of the afternoon, and putting things together, he began to dislike Vincent as cordially as his kind nature could.

The next morning things were rather better. The respectable, old-fashioned world of Woolsborough was waked by its chiming

bells to a Sunday of glorious sunshine, still, serene, and veiled in golden mists which rolled off gradually.

Paul ran down the broad old staircase at River Gate ; all the doors were open, and the house was full of sweet morning air, and smelling of roses, though a little of autumn too.

The tall dining-room windows stood open on the terrace. As Paul came into the room, Celia too came in from that outside Paradise of soft light and flowers. She was dressed in white that morning, with a knot of red carnations fastened at her throat. Paul's moment had come at last ; and he could say : ' Now you are all my own ! ' without being interfered with or heard by any one but his love herself. She was not demonstrative, certainly ; but he thought nothing of that at the time.

‘Why were you so cruel to me last night?’ he said; but then she freed the hand he was holding, and pushed him gently away with both of them, and would hardly give him one of her red carnations, though he begged for it humbly.

‘Dear, how beautiful you are!’ said Paul, when he had got his carnation, and had become a little more reasonable, as Celia called it. ‘And I let you send me away for the whole summer! You will never do that again.’

‘Hush!’ she said, for the footman was coming in with a tray. She was sitting now in a large chair by the window, and Paul was standing opposite to her; she had refused to go out into the garden. She did not herself think that she was looking at all pretty that morning; even Celia, as she rashly trusted to nature to keep her beau-

tiful, could not be quite proof against the ravages of a bad night. But then she never had a bad night : this was her first experience of such a horror, except the night after her father died.

‘What are you going to do to-day?’ said Paul. ‘Cathedral all day, I suppose? I shall ask old Chanter if he will let me play this afternoon.’

Dr. Chanter, the Cathedral organist, a genius in his way, and an autocrat, was Paul’s chief friend at Woolsborough.

‘Will you give up the Cathedral to-day,’ said Celia, when they were alone again, ‘and do something for me?’

She was looking at him anxiously ; some shadow of trouble had found its way into her eyes that morning, as Paul now began to see.

‘What is the matter, dear?’ he asked

with sudden eagerness. 'Of course! What can I do?'

'Oh, Paul, you will think me such an odd girl,' she said. 'I am going to treat you so badly. I want you to go away to-day, to go off somewhere for a long walk, I mean, and not come back till the evening. Will you do this to please me, without my telling you why?'

One need hardly say that Celia knew the nature she had to do with; she knew that an appeal like this would touch its highest point. A man with the makings of a poet in him is of some use to other people, though they may agree in calling him a muff. Still, it was a hard thing to ask of her young lover, who had been banished from her all the summer, and had scarcely yet seen or spoken to her since he came to Woolsborough. Paul looked at her im-



ploringly ; her eyes as they met his were mysterious, and told him nothing, except that she meant what she said. He made a little movement towards her ; but then the Canon's dignified step was heard slowly coming downstairs.

‘Do you love me, Celia ?’ said Paul. ‘If you do, it is all right, and I will give you my life itself.’

‘Don’t make conditions,’ she said. ‘I don’t want your life. There is another red pink for you.’

And then the Canon came creaking in, with his satisfied smile, and his half-confidential ‘*Good* morning, young people !’—that emphasis on the ‘good’ was a trial to some of his acquaintances, who did not quite believe in the Canon.

Then came Mrs. Percival, really kind, happy and smiling, and breakfast was very

pleasant, though Celia had just turned Paul out of Paradise. In her presence, Paul was a little shy with the elder people, and she herself that morning did not seem much inclined to talk ; but Vincent did not appear, so that there was nothing discordant.

Afterwards Paul went off through the garden, and across the ferry, without a word to anyone of his intentions.

When the Cathedral bells had nearly done ringing, and Canon Percival, looking very handsome in his surplice and college cap, had started off across the broad sunshine of the Close, Celia came down and overtook her aunt at the door. Vincent had not yet appeared ; but his mother had seen him, and explained that he had a headache.

‘ I felt rather angry with him last night,’ said Mrs. Percival. ‘ He kept you out too

late on the river. It was hard on Paul. He behaved like an angel though.'

'He is angelic,' said Celia quietly. 'But Vincent didn't know.'

'No; very true.' As Mrs. Percival said this, she determined in her own mind that she would tell Vincent before he went away. 'And where is Paul now?' she asked. 'Not escaped to Dr. Chanter already?'

'Paul? I can't exactly tell you where he is now. He has gone off for a long walk somewhere.'

'Really, Celia? How odd! how very unlike him!'

'Between ourselves, Aunt Flo,' said Celia rather haughtily, and with a slight effort, 'it was not his own wish. I sent him.'

'You sent him! Why?'

‘ You are clever enough to guess my reasons.’

‘ You think Vincent will guess if he sees too much of Paul. Well, my dear, if he does, I think that would be better than making a sacrifice of Paul.’

But as she spoke there sprang a keen suspicion into Mrs. Percival’s mind. Was there anything underhand in Celia’s affairs? Could anything possibly be going on between her and Vincent that the elders did not know? He certainly had come in very dismal from the river, and his behaviour all the evening had been singular in its rudeness. She quite believed that he knew nothing of Celia’s engagement; but had Celia misled him in any way on that subject? Naturally, perhaps, Mrs. Percival felt sure that her son, and not her niece, must be the injured person. Women, she

would have argued smilingly, can always take better care of themselves than poor dear men. However, as the deep shadow of the Cathedral porch received herself and Celia, Mrs. Percival resolved to say nothing more till the evening ; and then, if things led up to it, to have an explanation with her son.

Meanwhile, Paul had left the city and river far behind him—Cathedral, and organ, and chapter, old elms in the Close, red gateways, beetling old windows ; narrow streets with their shutters shut, full of smart shop - people in ‘Sunday garments glittering gay’ ; back lanes and courts, where dirty men and women crouched on doorsteps, untouched by the grand religious influences that for so many centuries had governed the town, deaf to the meaning of the bells that clanged from a dozen steeples

in rivalry of the deeper chime of the Cathedral—the Woolsborough Sunday was left behind, only its bells following the truant for miles, that still autumn day, and the scent of the River Gate garden going with him always in Celia's red flowers. He was not thinking of much besides Celia, as he walked westward across meadows and through the green luxuriant lanes where blackberries were ripening, and leaves beginning to be tinted with the last glories of the year. He was not unhappy, and it never occurred to him to be angry with Celia, though she had sent him away from her for a whole long day. He was one of those people, of a dreamy disposition, who can always be happy alone. The strong passions and excitements of life, which they share with other human beings, seldom come to people like this without bringing

them pain, all the sharper for their seeming indifference : these sleepy natures suffer terribly when they are awaked, but they enjoy intensely too. Still, they seem to find their true happiness—perhaps content is the right word—in following their own pursuits quietly. And yet they are those who have it in them to reach far, even to

‘The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky.’

Before Paul fell in love with Celia, he used to tease Canon Percival a good deal about those dwellers in the back lanes of Woolsborough. He wished very much to talk to the Dean about it, and to have a Minor Canon sent out from the Cathedral, with a few chosen choristers, to hold an open-air service on the quay, at the foot of

a certain steep dark street running down to the river. Then he saw in his mind's eye a procession headed by these choristers, in which all sorts of strange beings would be led gradually up the street, on across the Close, into the Cathedral itself. Why was that great church built, if not to gather souls like these? But Paul's arguments did not commend themselves to the Canon, who smiled blandly, and remembered an engagement. Mrs. Percival was much more sympathetic, and sighed over impossibilities. Celia, when she came, gave no sympathy at all. She would not even listen to such dreams, but quietly put herself in place of them.

Paul walked on across country, that Sunday morning, in a sort of vague golden atmosphere made of thoughts of Celia. He understood pretty well that he was sent



out of the way of that sulky Vincent. He thought it was rather a pity, and could not quite see why the thing should have been hidden at all. If Vincent did not like it, what could that matter? It was no affair of his. Celia was not his sister; the fact that his father and mother had been very good to her did not give him a right to be consulted. Paul's reason told him all this, but he would not have expressed it to Celia. He was obeying her wish, and that was enough: the time of trial would soon be over now.

Paul walked on through that peaceful, pastoral country, never lonely, though so still. The villages, which he avoided, lay to right and left of him; the deep meadows were full of cattle, feeding; the old red farmsteads lay half-asleep in the sun, in the middle of their loaded orchards; and the

church-bells answered each other across the stretches of shining, shadowy plain. He had started before ten o'clock, and two hours' walking brought him to one of the most picturesque villages in the country. There was nothing new to be seen there; the houses, set, as it seemed, in masses of many-coloured flowers, were all built of grey stone, a few whitewashed—nearly all roofed with beautiful old thatch. The church and churchyard were set on the side of a hill; its small wooden steeple was silent when Paul got there, for service was going on. The hand of restoration had touched this church very gently, only helping it to bear its weight of years; for it was one of the oldest, and, to some people's eyes, the most beautiful, in all the country-side. Someone had planted a rose by the porch, which was now climbing all over the roof, mixed with

the ivy it found there. The small, sloping churchyard was fenced with a stone wall, lovely in itself, with a yellow and green embroidery of moss and fern. Two old yews laid their heavy shadow on the graves, especially the older ones ; out in a patch of sunshine were the newer graves, with fresh wreaths upon them. Behind the village, above the churchyard, the country suddenly changed its character, breaking into a ridge of hills, from the highest of which—a wild sheep-walk, partly clothed with bracken, and crowned with fir-trees—one looked down first on a very great house, in a park, belonging to a certain Sir John Lefroy, and then on a wide westerly view beyond, bounded by blue hills that suggested Wales.

Paul was rather hot and tired when he reached the little village. He crossed the stone stile into the churchyard, and walked

softly on the grass to the entrance of the low, dark porch. He had heard the people singing as he came along the road; they were singing still, not very musically, to the groaning of an organ badly played. Presently, as Paul listened, they stopped, and the sermon began. Paul knew something of the good old Vicar of the place, whose sermons matched his church excellently well. But this morning a harsh new voice startled him unpleasantly. Some strange clergyman began preaching on the Creeds of the Church. Their days were numbered, in his opinion; but he spoke of them with a kindly air of patronage, and advised his hearers—the old blacksmith, the carpenter's wife, the waggoner and his family—to bear with them for the present: ‘Till you and I can make something better for ourselves.’

Paul, though a young Oxford man and a thinker in his way, turned impatiently from the church door, and was crossing the path on his way to the upper stile, when a man came out of the church with such hasty strides that he ran against him and nearly knocked him down.

‘Mille pardons, monsieur!’ he exclaimed in great confusion, adding thus to Paul’s amazement. He recovered himself instantly, however.

‘It is I who must apologise,’ Paul said in English. ‘You naturally did not expect to find me there.’

‘Mon Dieu, non!’

Paul was glad to find himself understood. He looked at his new acquaintance with some interest and curiosity, as they both turned off across the grass in the same direction, passing open windows, through

which the advanced doctrines of the preacher still fell upon their ears. By mutual consent they were silent till they had climbed the slope to the stile beyond the church, which led to a path crossing the hills.

The Frenchman walked on a pace or two in front of Paul, who remembered, as he followed him, that the Lefroys were Roman Catholics, and had a good many foreign connections. That might account for what seemed at first such a strange phenomenon.

This foreigner was a good deal older than Paul ; a man of forty, or rather more. He was dressed in an English suit of light tweed, in which he looked odd, somehow. But he was unquestionably a good-looking man ; tall and broad, with a short, fair beard and fierce moustache, and particularly amiable, gentle blue eyes. In his younger days he had been considered the handsomest man in Paris. In

fact, he owed his wife to his good looks and charming disposition, for he was a poor man, though the head of one of the oldest and noblest families in France.

When they had reached the top of the hill, he turned round smiling to Paul, and began to make another apology, this time in English, which he spoke remarkably well.

‘I am perfectly desolated and crushed by my rudeness,’ he said. ‘I also disturbed the poor dear congregation, who were listening like the best of sheep to that oversetting sermon.’

‘They could not understand it, I should think, luckily,’ said Paul. ‘I came in for a few sentences, which seemed to me very ignorant nonsense.’

‘Well, I am glad we agree. You are perhaps a Catholic, sir?’

‘No ; not in your sense,’ said Paul.

‘ Well, forgive me. I shall understand in time. My catastrophe to-day was a punishment, I must tell you. Let me explain. I am staying at the Hall down there—with a sort of cousins, the Lefroys. But you are acquainted, no doubt?’

‘ This is not my county. I only know Sir John Lefroy by name.’

‘ Ah—pardon—well, yesterday evening there was a party at dinner, and a very charming English lady was kind enough to inform me about the Church of England, which she said was purely and simply another branch of ours. She begged me to attend the services to-day, and to judge for myself. We had our own mass this morning, of course, in my cousin’s chapel. Afterwards I kept my promise, and visited the village church. All I will say is that I do not see much resemblance.’



He smiled pleasantly, and shrugged his shoulders.

‘But you must not judge by what you heard this morning,’ said Paul. ‘That gentleman is one of our new lights, I suppose. To me they are all rather illogical—but he is worse than that.’

‘Many people will not believe in a creed of his making?’

‘I should think not—but I suppose he will be satisfied if he believes in it himself.’

‘And it is all like that. Then my pretty friend was mocking me.’

‘No ; I don’t think so,’ said Paul.

It was a puzzling position to be placed in suddenly, the position of apologist for the English Church. However, Paul was good at argument : and he had not to do with a bigot or a specialist, but with an amiable,

liberal, and perfectly courteous man. They crossed the stile and slowly climbed the hill. Under the fir-trees at the top they sat down, and talked for a long time. Presently they heard the chatter and tramp of the congregation coming out of church, but no one came their way ; they sat in the hot, still shade—there was not even wind enough to make music in the branches above them—and they talked on, passing from religious questions to politics, and then to more personal matters, till they had actually talked themselves into a sort of friendship. It was, of course, the Frenchman's doing ; he was the most friendly and sociable of men ; and he had taken a fancy to Paul in the moment that they met so strangely at the church-door. It was not very wonderful. Paul was cultivated, he was thoughtful and clever, he was a little old-fashioned in his manners and talk, and

he was not limited by any suspicion of foreigners. He liked older men than himself, and had preferred Colonel Ward, till now, to any of his younger friends, of whom, in fact, he had not many. With such men, if they suited him, he was not boyish and shy, as women often found him ; or odd and dismal, as some men thought him. Paul, at his best, was a young man worth knowing, and worth talking to ; but not very many people were aware of this.

Before they parted, Paul had told the Frenchman about his old home in Surrey ; and the Frenchman had told him that he, too, had an old house of his own down in the west of France, but almost too ruinous to be inhabited, except in the height of summer. He also told Paul that his wife had died several years ago, and that he had one child, a daughter of fourteen ; but Paul's

confidence did not go quite to this length, and he said nothing about Celia.

At last they were disturbed by the clanging of a bell from the great house of the park.

‘I must go,’ said Paul’s new friend; ‘but first, my dear sir, let us know each other’s names,’ and he handed Paul a card on which the inscription looked very splendid. ‘*Mis. de la Tour-Montmirail.*’

‘Thank you very much,’ said Paul. ‘I haven’t got a card. My name is Romaine—Paul Romaine.’

‘That is not hard to remember,’ said *M. de Montmirail*. ‘And you are staying at Woolsborough? I hope we shall meet again.’

He bowed, and then took Paul’s fingers for a moment, smiling: then bowed again, and walked off with rather careful steps down the rough side of the hill.

Paul sat where he had left him for some time longer, gazing at the wide blue view, thinking of the queer encounter and all they had talked about. Then he suddenly found out that he was very hungry, and he left his hill-top and went down into the village, where he got some bread and cheese at the little inn, before starting off by a long roundabout way back to Woolsborough. If he did not reappear before six o'clock, he supposed Celia would be satisfied.





## CHAPTER VI.

### VINCENT.

PAUL'S little world at River Gate had not been very peaceful while he was away. He had the best of it, out in the quiet country, with the easy and agreeable companionship of M. de Montmirail, and the silent friendliness of cows, sheep, and butterflies. Of the people he had left behind, not any were without their own causes of disquietude, except perhaps the Canon, who was a very happy man.

Vincent was in a terrible temper that Sunday afternoon. He visited his private

griefs on his mother and the servants, finding out that his packing for India had been entirely neglected, though, in fact, her head and their hands had been busy with it for a week past. He tormented everyone frightfully for about two hours that hot afternoon—everyone but Celia, who kept prudently out of the way. At last, Mrs. Percival began to see that he was growing more calm, and beginning to believe her assurances that everything had been thought of. She could not exactly be angry with Vincent, when he was going to leave her the next day, probably for years ; but his selfish, inconsiderate, ungrateful complaints and grumbling, his exigence beyond all limits, were almost too much for her generally charming temper, and she was looking quite pale and tired when she escaped at last into her shady sitting-room, sank into a low chair, and took

up a fan. Hers, however, was one of those natures which rebounds instantly, and sees the bright side of things in spite of itself. Of course she loved her son, and his going away was a serious trouble to her ; but, at the same time, she was conscious that his departure meant peace. Perhaps, after all, he would be ordered home before so very long ; and in the meantime Celia's affairs would be happily and irrevocably settled ; there would be no more anxiety on that account. But Mrs. Percival decided, as she fanned herself, that she really could not tell Vincent of Celia's engagement to-day. Celia must be left to manage her own affairs ; and, being now harder-hearted than in the morning, Mrs. Percival reflected that Vincent was perfectly able to take care of himself. The Canon was right ; neither of these young people was a fool. As Mrs. Percival



comforted herself thus, the door was opened impatiently and Vincent came in. Her little room, and especially her very comfortable sofa, was a favourite refuge of his on these summer afternoons ; it looked over trees and down the river, away from the Cathedral, which Vincent did not care to contemplate, and away from its chimes, which he hated to hear.

‘ Very well,’ said Mrs. Percival, when her son came in, and flung himself as usual on the sofa. ‘ I see you have a horrid headache still. So have I. You had better go to sleep for an hour, my dear.’

Vincent made no reply at once. Presently he said : ‘ Mother, I have something on my mind.’

‘ I hoped it was all off your mind by this time,’ said Mrs. Percival. ‘ Something else forgotten ?’

‘No, no, mother! don’t go on plaguing about that. It is something you will have to do for me while I am away.’

‘Oh certainly, dear Vinny! What is it?’

‘Take care of Celia.’

To say that these words startled Mrs. Percival would be speaking very mildly. They literally took her breath away. She gasped, and her pale face became crimson. Vincent, staring out of the window, was not instantly aware of her consternation; but her silence made him look at her.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked, with something like a smile. ‘I say, what the deuce have I said?’

‘Take care of Celia!’ Mrs. Percival repeated, in a stifled, horrified whisper.

‘You think I ought to make a better match—is that it?’ he said coolly. ‘I think I am old enough to judge for myself.’

Anyhow, I mean to marry Celia. Not just yet, of course. But I have friends out there who can get me a staff appointment, if they exert themselves ; and then, if I can't get leave, she can come out to me. Many girls do the same ; it's nothing. As for being poor, of course we shall be poor. You are surprised, of course ; you did not expect it. I am rather surprised at myself. But there are times in a man's life when the only thing to say is, "Prudence be hanged !" and this is one of them, my dear mother, you see.'

' Vincent, I don't know what to say to you !' exclaimed Mrs. Percival. ' How could you—— What a dreadful, dreadful thing !'

Her son stared at her now in some astonishment ; he had not expected that his announcement would be so terribly hard to swallow.

She started up from her chair, and walked away from him to the farthest window, swinging her fan backwards and forwards violently, while the sudden colour fled from her face, leaving her painfully pale.

‘Would anyone believe that a woman could be so worldly!’ said Vincent in a voice of extreme irritation. ‘Your niece is left without a penny; you have her to live with you. A pretty girl; more than that—one of the most beautiful girls in England, and the most taking. You make use of her from morning till night. Your own daughter, if you had one, would not be half such a slave. She tires herself to death doing your flowers and things, and works like a horse entertaining people at your stupid parties. And after all that, because I happen to appreciate her, you speak to me as if I had committed a crime. “A dreadful, dreadful thing!”

“How could I”—how could I do anything else, I wonder? Upon my word, I don’t understand you. The way you take it is extraordinary.’

Great are the inconsistencies of human nature. This same man, twenty-four hours before, would have said it was impossible he should marry his cousin ; would have hardly confessed, then, that he was very much in love with her. Strange inconsistency, and strange effect of a little opposition !

During these disagreeable remarks of Vincent’s, Mrs. Percival stood at the window and collected her wits. She realized that the person to be blamed was not Vincent, but Celia, who must have deceived him for her own amusement in some unaccountable way. It must have been merely for amusement ; she could not think of jilting Paul. Vincent, poor thing, might be carried away

by his feelings. A girl like Celia, never ; at least, Mrs. Percival could hardly believe it.

‘ Does Celia know ? ’ she said, without looking round.

‘ I told her yesterday,’ Vincent answered. ‘ She would not listen. I suppose she thought it wouldn’t do : girls don’t understand. But she will find I am not to be put off like that. As to saying anything more to her now, I am not sure. I shall write to her. In the meanwhile, you have got to see that nobody else carries her off. Her having no money is a protection, of course : men in these days don’t run after poor girls, however pretty they may be.’

Vincent’s way of talking was characteristic of him, and did not surprise his mother much, though perhaps it struck her more painfully than ever before. However, she was at present possessed by one thought ; this affair

must be cleared up ; whether Celia wished it or not, Vincent must know all, and understand plainly that there was no hope for him. No wonder Celia had seemed a little *distracted* that morning ; no wonder she had sent Paul away for the day.

Mrs. Percival turned away from the window, came back to her chair, and sat down. Her face was full of trouble ; she played with her fan, and did not look at Vincent, who watched her with a curious, sardonic expression.

‘ I am to understand, then, Vincent,’ she said, ‘ that Celia has refused you ?’

‘ Something of the kind,’ he said. ‘ It was impossible ; she couldn’t ; and so forth. You have brought her up to be as prudent as yourself.’

‘ You need not say that. Besides, Celia has only lived with me for a few months, as you

know. She gave you no reason—no real reason, I mean ?

‘ No. I believe she said what she thought she ought to say. You would object ; it would be ruin to me, and the rest of it. All that is my affair, as I shall make her understand. She will say “ yes ” in the end.’

‘ I think not, Vincent.’

‘ Why ?’ he said angrily.

‘ She ought to have told you herself ; it is no use telling half the truth. She was right so far, you know. Your father and I must have objected strongly to such an absurd marriage for you. It would not have been for Celia’s happiness either ; and I am bound to think of that.’

‘ You had better leave that to us, mother. What do you mean, though ?’

‘ Celia is the kind of girl who ought to marry a rich man. You may believe me,



Vincent, when she refused you, she meant it.'

'And where is the rich man to come from?' he said, frowning. 'Upon my word, you talk in plainer English than most people. Celia a girl to refuse a man because he is poor! Why you should attribute such motives to your niece I cannot conceive,' said this suddenly unworldly hero. 'She refused me because she thought it was her duty. You can't understand her; she is a far finer girl than you think. Let me tell you she likes me too much to refuse me for any other reason.'

'I tell you, Vincent,' said his mother, looking at him now, and speaking quite solemnly, 'Celia refused you because she means to marry a rich man. And she ought to have told you the whole truth about it.'

‘Nonsense ! How could she tell me such a thing as that ? You are losing your senses. Besides, it’s a lie !’

Mrs. Percival flushed a little, but answered him very quietly :

‘I have no doubt you made it difficult for her. Now prepare yourself, for I must tell you what you will think bad news. Celia is engaged. Now you know the truth about it.’

‘To a rich man ?’ asked Vincent, with sneering coolness, though his eyes flashed and a curious white look came into his face.

‘Yes, to a rich man. No one knows of the engagement except your father and myself. Unless you insist, perhaps I need not tell you who it is. He does not belong to this neighbourhood.’

‘Young Romaine, for instance ?’ said Vincent ; and he yawned.

‘Why do you think so ? Yes, it is Paul

Romaine. And I think Celia is a fortunate girl.'

'How long has this been going on?'

'Since he left Oxford in June. He was here for a few days then ; you were away.'

'And what excellent object was gained by not telling me?'

'I don't know, Vincent, really,' his mother said, after a moment's hesitation. 'Celia wished most particularly that no one should know. We wanted to have a quiet, comfortable summer. He being so young, there was no hurry, and he was going abroad for some weeks—he has only just come back, you know. Your father and I agreed with Celia : we were glad to say nothing. I meant to tell you about it in my first letter this week. Of course, when we leave Woolsborough and go to Holm, it won't matter ; everybody must know soon. And if I could have fore-

seen such a complication as this—well, I have had my fears—but your father and I both thought that you and Celia were too sensible for any nonsense, and we knew you did not particularly like Paul ; and we thought it would be pleasanter——’

Vincent threw himself back on the sofa, and burst into a loud fit of laughter. His mother, it must be confessed, felt more inclined to cry. In the course of her easy, luxurious life, she had hardly ever met with anything so disagreeable.

‘ Miss Celia—well, she is a clever girl !’ Vincent exclaimed at last.

‘ If she has encouraged you—if she has flirted with you, she has behaved shamefully,’ said Mrs. Percival. ‘ My dear, believe me, I am most dreadfully sorry that this has happened.’

‘ So am I. You have made me look like

an uncommon fool. But you need not blame Celia ; she snubbed me as much as she could, and made me very angry.'

He was quiet enough now : he even seemed, for some mysterious reason, to be in a better temper than before he heard the news which made his case hopeless. Mrs. Percival saw that the awful scene of ravings and reproaches, which she had feared, was not to take place after all ; she felt comforted accordingly.

' I do hope you will forgive us, Vincent dear,' she said. ' You know what a trouble this is to me ; and I feel that we have all treated you so badly. One tries to act for the best, and then this sort of thing happens. I think Celia must be very sorry, too. I am sure she is—she likes you so much, and you have been so happy together all this time. Can't you understand a little, dear, that we

didn't wish to interfere with such a nice cheerful summer? But now I do hope you will go away and forget all about it. I assure you Celia was not quite the right sort of girl for you—to marry, I mean—never could have been. She is very dear and nice, and all that ; but there is not very much in her. If either of you had had enough money—even then I should have been sorry—I couldn't have approved. First cousins, too—such a pity !

As Mrs. Percival gently chattered thus, she was looking her sweetest ; the trouble had gone out of her eyes, and they were smiling and shining as usual ; her pretty hands caressed her fan. One of the little dogs came scratching at the door before she had quite done ; she got up and let him in, talking all the time. She had had a bad quarter of an hour, certainly ; but, like a

certain King of old, she seemed to think that its bitterness was past.

‘And you are going to marry Celia to that boy! Celia!’ Vincent muttered half to himself, without taking any notice of her explanations. ‘That is what you call a rich man! And you think those two suited to each other, do you?’

‘He is a rich man, and a very dear fellow,’ said Mrs. Percival rather faintly.

‘A muff and a milksop, with his head wrapped up in books and organs. However, if you are pleased—and Celia——’

He got up and marched out of the room.

Mrs. Percival drew a long breath, fanned herself, and stroked her little dog.

‘Oh, my Toto!’ she said. ‘Why are not men as nice as little dogs?’

There was only one answer possible, which Toto gave with many wags of fun and

affection—because little dogs are made so much nicer than men.

When Captain Percival left his mother, he went heavily downstairs and out into the garden, feeling himself a terribly injured man. This concealment of a fact that touched him so nearly might be apologized for ; it could hardly be forgiven. They had all behaved to him abominably. If he had been a gossiping girl, they could not have treated him with more insulting distrust. Early in the summer, when this was arranged, he would not have cared a straw who Celia married : now it was a different thing. Celia herself must have known perfectly well that he was falling in love with her ; her behaviour had been heartless, especially yesterday, when she laughed at him, and drew him on—yes, she certainly drew him on, only to laugh at him. He would not confess



it to his mother, but Celia's behaviour had made him very sore. He had been ready to give up everything for her. She, with her affairs comfortably arranged, must indeed have laughed at him for a fool. She unselfish! no, truly. 'Anyhow I couldn't do this,' she said; no, for a very good reason—'I am going to do something I like better.' And that maddening smile in her eyes all the time.

Vincent paced up and down the garden, thinking at first that he would go to London that night, and see none of them again. People who had treated him so odiously were not worth a regret. His father, too; but he did not waste many thoughts on him, not having much esteem for his father. His mother and Celia were the people he wanted to punish. After all, starting off at once would be uncomfortable to himself, and would

do them no harm ; they might even be glad to get rid of him. Wandering along, his angry face bent towards the ground, he had reached one of the lower walks of the garden, a grass walk, backed by a tall hedge of laurustinus, bordered with a bright confusion of flowers, and looking straight over the old wall to the river, the meadows, the soft distant view of that country through which Paul was now returning. And at the end of this walk there was a summer-house, fenced in by roses ; and in the shadow, as he came near, Vincent caught sight of a figure in a white dress, sitting. He had been arranging with himself, a moment before, that he would treat Celia with the coldest contempt, and hardly even speak to her, except to say good-bye. But this resolution had been made when Celia was nowhere near ; and now another moment

brought him to the summer-house. She got up, looking pale in the trembling shadows, and her eyes were anxious, though she smiled.

‘Is the packing all done?’ she said. ‘Does Aunt Flo want me?’

‘No, she doesn’t want you,’ said Vincent; ‘but I do. Don’t be frightened. I only wish to offer you my—congratulations, I suppose, on your brilliant prospects.’

Celia looked at him; she was not smiling now. His look and tone of bitter coldness and anger roused some defiance to meet it. She coloured, drew herself up, and waited silently.

‘I have only just been told what I should have known all the summer,’ Vincent went on. ‘I consider that I have been abominably treated. I have been cheated and deceived. My mother knows what I think,

and I shall not forgive her or my father. As to *you* '—and his voice suddenly changed —‘ Celia ! Celia !’

It was a cry of real passion, and Celia was frightened ; not so much perhaps at him, as at the sudden and overpowering wave of feeling in herself which answered it. What was to happen, indeed, if she could not hold her own now !

Vincent came a step nearer, and took both her hands, looking down into her eyes and speaking in a low voice, terrible to her from its very restraint. She bit her lips and stood before him like a statue.

‘ Has my mother told me the truth ?’ he said. ‘ Is it true that you are engaged to young Romaine ? Why did not you tell me yesterday, or weeks ago ? Why did you make me love you, only to end like this ? Answer me, Celia.’

‘Because—if you were nice like other people,’ murmured Celia in desperation, ‘one wouldn’t be afraid to tell you things. As to making you—you know that is false. I have done nothing of the kind. When you said those things yesterday I was dreadfully sorry ; but I did not bring it on myself, you know I did not. Let me go, please. Yes, I am engaged. Let me go.’ He dropped her hands, but still stood in the door of the summer-house, so that she could not pass.

‘Why did not you tell me yesterday, in the boat?’ he said. ‘Why were you afraid? What could I have done?’

‘You might have upset the boat,’ she answered, with a faint smile. ‘You said you would, once.’

‘A witch like you could not have been drowned.’

‘A baby could—and you were not sure which I was, yesterday.’

She was glad, for a moment, of this return to the old terms of chaffing and nonsense, that seemed natural between them. But, after all, an angry distance would have been better. The anger was fading out of his face, but it was not succeeded by indifference.

‘Celia, you are an awful girl,’ he said. ‘You break one’s heart, and won’t let one be angry with you. What nonsense it is, this engagement! My mother made it up, of course. You can’t marry a fellow like that—you. Break it off, Celia—dear—for my sake—and come out to me as soon as I can send for you—or marry me to-morrow morning, if you will. I felt sure, don’t you see, that you would not say no, and I began telling mother my plans just now, and she crushed me with this horrible news. I dare

say it drove me mad, at first, and I did not know what I was saying. If I have spoken to you like a brute, forgive me—Celia !

If Vincent could have known how Celia was fighting against herself at that moment, and how joyfully half of her would have given itself to him, his victory would not have been doubtful for two minutes longer. But he did not know, and thought her coldness greater than it really was ; and so he went on talking with a doubt of his success, which every moment became more unlikely. If Celia had time to think, the prudent and the practical were sure to gain the day. And then, long before his hopeless pleading was finished, came Mrs. Percival's voice calling over the garden—‘ Celia, Celia !’—and his cousin turned to him, her eyes wonderful in their depth of smiling blue, and said :

‘Some day you will know it is all for the best. Look here : cousins have a right to be very fond of each other, and I shall always be very fond of you.’

Vincent laughed.

‘Cold comfort, my dear,’ he said. ‘Fond or not, I have been horribly treated. Celia—I think you might kiss me—once, to make up for it all.’

‘Aunt Flo is coming,’ Celia said ; but she did not think it necessary to carry her snubbing any further : poor Vincent was quite tame now, and was going away to-morrow.

They strolled up the garden together ; and when Mrs. Percival met them, though Vincent was melancholy, Celia was laughing. Mrs. Percival looked at her niece with admiration and wonder.





## CHAPTER VII.

### ILLUMINATIONS.

MRS. PERCIVAL generally had a tea-party on Sunday afternoon. People had a way of driving in from the country to the far-famed evening service at Woolsborough Cathedral, and River Gate was a very agreeable refuge on these occasions ; Canon Percival was always hospitable and gracious, his wife was always charming. Towards half-past six a large party used to stream across the Close from River Gate to the Cathedral, with a certainty of finding good places ; for the head

verger, the greatest man in Woolsborough, was Mrs. Percival's slave.

On Vincent's last Sunday, only one party of people came in to tea. They were entertained by the Canon, Mrs. Percival, and Celia, as pleasantly as usual; but they were not interesting people, and they went away early, having brought some visitors of their own with them, to whom they wished to show the Cathedral.

'They wanted you to go with them, Uncle Tom,' said Celia, looking up with some mischief in her eyes.

'They must excuse me, Celia,' said the Canon. 'I cannot act showman for ever, you see; and these good people—you will agree with me that they are a little dull, and that half an hour of them is enough. Some of these excellent country clergy don't quite realize that the Canon of a cathedral, and

the rector of a large town parish, like me, has a good deal to occupy his time, without the self-imposed duty of giving lectures to ladies on architecture. Of course, if people are really intelligent, really artistic, it is a different thing ; they are worth a little sacrifice.'

Or really rich, really great, really worth cultivating in any way, an ill-natured person might have added ; but there was not one present, fortunately.

'No more tea, thank you, my dear,' said the Canon. 'I hope you are going to make a disturbance about this tea ; there is certainly something wrong in the flavour. Celia, you are looking brilliant. And where is poor Vincent ? I must have a talk with my son before I lose him.'

'I think he escaped into the library,' said Mrs. Percival.

‘There I shall find him, probably,’ said the Canon, and he walked away. Not finding Vincent in the library, he did not search any further, but sat down in his favourite chair and fell peacefully asleep.

The aunt and niece, left together in the drawing-room, were silent for a minute or two. Each of them hardly knew whether she ought to be angry with the other; both of them, being very sweet-tempered, were unwilling to find this necessary. Those good people from the country had arrived almost directly after Mrs. Percival met the two young people in the garden, so that there had been no time yet for any explanation.

‘Paul ought to be in soon,’ said Mrs. Percival, having given her little dogs their bits of sugar and saucers of cream. ‘How about Paul, Celia? Do you know that I have been very much startled to-day?’

‘ I hope you have heard nothing about me to vex you, Aunt Flo,’ said Celia meekly ; her tone now was very different from what it had been in the morning.

‘ Most likely you know already what I have heard.’ Mrs. Percival went on talking, moving slowly about the room all the time, while Celia sat still with her hands folded, looking curiously grave and sweet : ‘ Of course Vincent went out to you, after he had been talking to me. Yes, I know all about it, Celia ; and I am only very, very sorry that Vincent was not told from the first. He said he ought to have been told, and he was quite right. If he had known from the beginning, this would not have come into his head at all—people don’t set their hearts on impossibilities. I am very sorry for the whole affair, and only glad that—that it is impossible, in fact—for

your uncle and I could never have consented.'

'No ; I told him so ; of course I am not good enough,' murmured Celia with a slight smile.

'You told him this and that,' said Mrs. Percival ; 'but, unfortunately, you did not tell him the whole truth at once, which cost me a trying scene this afternoon. As to your not being good enough, my dear, there is no occasion to say foolish things. You know perfectly well what I mean. But why did not you tell Vincent of your engagement, yesterday ?'

'I could not. I told him what ought to have been quite enough.'

'Was he reasonable this afternoon ? Not too angry, I mean ?'

'Not too angry,' Celia answered. 'We are very good friends now.'

‘He has been rather spoilt,’ sighed his mother. ‘You have spoilt him a little this summer, Celia, like the rest of us.’

‘One couldn’t help it.’

‘No, one couldn’t help it. With all his naughty ways and his temper, there is something so splendid about Vincent. Still I am afraid, Celia—don’t you think you might have been more careful?’

‘I don’t know, Aunt Flo. As you say, one does not trouble much about things that are impossible. How could I ever guess that Vincent would take it into his head to care for a beggar-girl like me? I neither expected nor wished it. I could not have been stiff with him; and you would not have wished that. We have had a very jolly summer,’ she said, with something like a sigh, ‘and I don’t think it is quite my fault if it has ended in a thunderstorm.’

Mrs. Percival glanced at her niece across the room. The Canon, as usual, had chosen a wrong moment for paying Celia a compliment on her brilliant looks. Celia was tired, worn, and pale ; she had not recovered from her bad night ; and the second scene with Vincent had been a good deal more exciting than the first. Mrs. Percival was capable enough of blindness when she did not wish to see ; but no one, knowing Celia intimately, could look at her now without seeing that she had gone through some straining experience.

‘ I am sorry, Celia,’ Mrs. Percival began in a low voice.

‘ Not for me, I suppose,’ said the girl lightly. ‘ Here is Paul.’

At the same moment Paul came into the room. Mrs. Percival was startled, for she had not heard his step. Celia went forward



to meet him with her sweetest smile ; poured out tea for him, asked him about his walk, made him altogether perfectly welcome.

Paul's face was radiant in this sunshine, of which he had not yet enjoyed much. This was a very different thing from arriving all alone, twenty-four hours before, with no Celia to receive him. Mrs. Percival's amiabilities had been no compensation, and her charming drawing-room had been a desert. Now it was Eden once more ; and Paul drank his tea in grateful peace. It did not occur to him to find fault with the flavour.

Mrs. Percival walked out on the terrace for a few minutes, leaving Celia and Paul together. She was half conscious of being a little angry with Celia, whose last words to her, 'Not for me, I suppose,' had in them, somehow, something of the nature of a slap.

All very fine : but had not Celia herself confessed, long ago, that she was not in love with Paul ? Of course she was not ; any-one could see that. Paul would see it himself, if he was not ignorant and blind. Supposing that their worldly advantages were equal, who could compare the two men, Vincent and Paul ? One was a dear, nice, clever boy ; the other, when he chose, was a singularly attractive man. Of course, he could not have married Celia ; and if he had been rich, he would never have thought of it. But Mrs. Percival felt in her heart that Celia was very much to be pitied, and refused to believe that Vincent's offer had roused no regret in her at all.

It was the old story of sour grapes ; but Celia was indeed foolish if she thought any amount of clever acting would deceive her. Mrs. Percival had not the smallest wish to

alter the course of things ; and perhaps she knew in her heart that she was a goose ; but that Celia should bring forward a touch of pride, and pretend to be a little contemptuous, instead of flattered, at her conquest of Vincent—this was ‘ most tolerable, and not to be endured.’ Neither could the sincerity of such feelings be for one moment believed in. Mrs. Percival carried with her, from that time, a secret conviction of Celia’s deep disappointment ; and for this reason she was not very much surprised at anything that happened afterwards. In truth, one must suppose she never really forgave Celia for attracting her son, or for pretending not to value the impossible prize that was offered to her.

In the drawing-room, Paul was giving Celia a history of his walk, the ancient church, the modern sermon, his French

friend so strangely met, and the interesting talk they had had together. It was impossible to find fault with the way that Celia listened, and her remarks were just what they ought to be. It was not till long afterwards that Paul realised how little he or his doings had ever been to her. She smiled with interest and amusement as she looked at the Frenchman's card, which he pulled out of his pocket.

‘But how magnificent!’ she said. ‘Really, it was quite a romantic adventure. I hear the Lefroys often have all sorts of foreigners staying with them. Most people think them dreadful. I am not sure that I don't, Paul, if you will forgive me; you know I am a thorough Englishwoman.’

‘You wouldn't think my man dreadful,’ said Paul. ‘I wish you could see him. But there is something else I want to tell

you. As I came home just now, I saw an illumination.'

'Really?' said Celia. 'Yes; how delightful!'

At that moment she was listening to something beyond Paul, and she looked up quickly at the window. She had heard a step that snatched her thoughts away—Vincent's step; he had joined his mother on the terrace, and they were now strolling up and down together. It seemed as if Vincent had forgiven his mother her sins against him, considering the parting that was so very near.

'It was a regular illumination,' Paul went on; her goodness made him so happy that he did not notice the sudden distraction. 'I wished you were there. I was coming down the hill towards the bridge, you know—trees in front, and then the river, and then all Woolsborough on the other bank, stretched

along and sloping up in that pretty way it does, with the Cathedral in the middle of it. Everything perfectly clear, and all the houses the deepest red. The sun was right behind me, shining across, don't you see ! And the west windows of the Cathedral and all the houses along the river were lit up with a perfect glory of light ; they shone gold, dazzling, especially the Cathedral. I'll tell *you*,' said Paul, a little oddly and wistfully, for he was not fond of making his fancies the property of others—'it was just as if angels were holding a festival inside the Cathedral. It couldn't have been lit up so gloriously for anything else.'

Then Paul came suddenly down to earth, was seized with a sort of shame and shyness, not caused, certainly, by Celia's gentle listening, made a dash at the cake, and begged her pardon for being so hungry.

‘And are you very tired?’ she said, ‘or will you come to the Cathedral with me to-night? Don’t be led away by Dr. Chanter; I want you to take care of me.’

‘Then that was what the illumination meant,’ said Paul.

Celia laughed. She got up, and as she walked away from the tea-table, lingered a moment and laid her hand on his shoulder. He was starting up, but Celia’s fingers were very strong, and seemed to keep him where he was. The people on the terrace had wandered away out of sight for the present.

‘Be still,’ said Celia. ‘I wanted to tell you—Vincent knows. My aunt thought she had better tell him.’

‘I’m awfully glad to hear it,’ said Paul. ‘I hate a secret. Thank you; that is good news. And—I’m afraid he thinks you are throwing yourself away—doesn’t he, dear?’

‘I don’t exactly know what he said to her,’ answered Celia, with a dreamy smile. ‘He congratulated me. But he is rather cross at not having been told before.’

‘I don’t wonder at that, you know,’ said Paul; and he got up in spite of the gentle restraint, took her hand from his shoulder and kissed it, and laid it back there again as he stood before her. ‘Sometimes I can’t believe it,’ he said. ‘It is too wonderful to be true, and I shall never deserve it, if I live as long as Methuselah.’

‘Yes, you will,’ she said, ‘if you are as good as you were to-day.’

‘How was I good to-day?’

‘In going away for all those hours, because I asked you.’

Paul laughed.

‘Little you know what I would do for you!’ he said.



‘Even wear dead flowers, which is sentimental, and a thing I hate,’ said Celia ; and she pulled the shrivelled carnation from his button-hole and threw it aside.

All this time she would hardly meet his eyes, and anyone less dazzled than he was, knowing her as he did, would have been aware of a restless, absent uneasiness of manner, increasing every moment, as she stood there with her young lover, and heard a distant sound on the terrace—familiar footsteps slowly approaching, a murmur of voices in the gathering mists of sunset.

Almost immediately she left Paul and walked quietly to the other end of the room, to the farthest window, reaching it just as her aunt and cousin came up to it from the outside. Mrs. Percival was very pale ; her eyes looked odd, as if she had been crying. Vincent was now perfectly calm and quiet ;

it seemed as if he had resigned himself to the inevitable. He hardly looked at Celia, but walked down the room towards the door, passing close to Paul by the way.

‘I hear you are in great luck,’ he said to Paul, stopping for a moment.

‘Thanks ; yes,’ said Paul.

‘I congratulate you,’ said Vincent.

Paul thanked him again, and he went straight out of the room.

Paul thought once more that Vincent was the most disagreeable man he had ever met.

But he forgot all drawbacks and annoyances that night in the Cathedral. The dim soft light, the dreamy arches, the mysterious world of shadows, those high spaces into which organ and voices seemed to float away, losing themselves, the high and holy gentleness of all the service, which seemed to make no demand on souls and ears, except peace

to receive what came so peacefully ; the great congregation—for all respectable Wools borough flocked to its Cathedral in the evening. There came a time when Paul ceased to find much reality or devotion in these services ; but at present he was young and happy, and able to live on dreams. He and Celia were alone together, to all intents and purposes ; and somehow it seemed to Paul that she no longer objected to be seen alone with him. It was a comfort that Vincent knew : soon everybody would know ; and then it would not be long before life changed into something almost too beautiful to think about. Behaviour in church was not exactly Celia's strong point ; but that evening Paul thought he had never seen anything so lovely and heavenly as the abstraction of her face. She sat looking a little upward all through the sermon ; not at the preacher, but away

through the great shining screen into the half-lighted solemnity of the choir. She might have been looking straight into Paradise, with that sweet, pure, thoughtful, unconscious exaltation of gaze and expression. It was something new to Paul ; he had never seen her look like that before.

‘ How beautiful she is ! ’ he thought over and over again.

His thoughts of her went on mingling with the sermon, to which he could not help listening. The preacher was a young man, who had lately been made Vicar of a large town parish in the diocese, and was already known all over England for his life and his words, which matched each other to an unusual degree. His eloquence had a special effect on young men, who crowded to hear him everywhere ; in his own town they would leave their shops and offices in the

middle of the day, and come to his church to hear a short address. That night at Woolsborough he was preaching about martyrdom ; and as he talked on, almost everyone in the Cathedral became aware that in his or her own nature there was something, a power of some kind, which under certain circumstances might rule supreme. Then there would be a discovery that love meant sacrifice ; and to those who knew what love was, martyrdom would follow naturally.

The listeners listened, Paul among them : all, no doubt, had their different thoughts. He thought what a poor thing his own love was, as far as he knew it ; and yet he thought he could die for Celia. But the preacher carried him on to higher worlds ; and for a few moments he even forgot Celia.

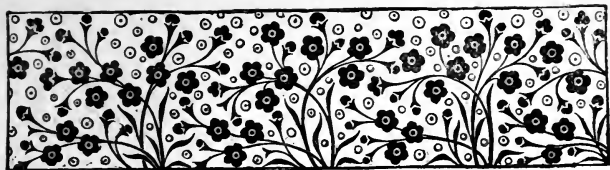
They lingered afterwards, to listen to Dr.

Chanter's playing, and when they came out of the great porch into the starlight, the streams of people had nearly passed away.

‘Celia,’ Paul said, as they crossed the Close, ‘it was an illumination, and at least there was one angel there. You looked like one.’

‘Don’t,’ she said quickly. ‘I hate you to talk like that. An angel! In a year you will think me a fiend.’





## CHAPTER VIII.

HOLM.

ONE morning, ten days later, Celia Darrell was standing at her window in Holm Lodge, looking out westward. Half the view was still veiled by the mists of the autumn morning; but the sun was slowly winning his way, laying long gold rays across the fields, touching the groups of great beeches, and the oaks that were just taking a tint of brown on their greenness, adding colour to the varying autumn colours, and making a world of lovely light and shadow, except on the southward slope of the hill, where the

‘sable, silent, solemn forest’ lay a dark mass, and seemed impenetrable even by sunshine. Among the trees, a mile or two away, the light had just touched the white spire of Holm Church ; beyond it more woods and rich green slopes, and then the mist that hid the distant hills.

Celia stood and looked out at this view with a faint, lazy smile. Most of the land she could see belonged to Paul Romaine, and would very soon belong to her ; he wanted the marriage to come off as soon as possible, and she, as she smilingly told her aunt, saw no reason for any delay. The tiresome business about Vincent had given her a certain dislike to Woolsborough, and also to any continued dependence on her aunt, who, in her opinion, had not been entirely nice about that. The prospect of a good fortune and perfect liberty was very agreeable ; and Paul,



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the necessary drawback to these things, was not nearly so bad as such an appendage might have been. Celia considered the case of a friend of hers who had married, for the same reasons, a vulgar cotton-spinner of fifty. Of course she ruled him, but she was ashamed of him ; his ignorances were terrible. Now Paul might be odd ; he might pass as a muff, even, among Celia's sort of men ; but he was young, good-looking, and a gentleman. This was a nicer sort of thing to rule than the other. Celia was quite satisfied. She was also proud of her own good sense, and by this time had laughed herself out of any lingering trouble about Vincent, though she often caught herself thinking of him. One cannot have everything in this world, she thought very justly ; some advantages must be given up for the sake of others. A little more of Vincent would have been dangerous,

it was true ; she was beginning to understand what love might be—a thing to upset all calculations. But he was gone ; that painful little excitement had passed away, and, just as he had prophesied, she had laughed and played tennis all the week with other people.

Now she had come with her uncle and aunt to Holm ; and Paul was at Red Towers. He had travelled with them, and they had all arrived late last night. It was amusing to come back to the same country she had visited last autumn, and to look at it with such different eyes. Then, she had been rather tired and bored with everything, though she did not show it much ; now, she was quite prepared to be pleased. She remembered Colonel Ward rather vaguely, as an old bore ; he was Paul's best friend, and must be cultivated ; especially as her

aunt said he was rich, and might leave Paul his money. Paul's house, too, was now a matter of critical interest.

Celia presently went downstairs, in a cheerful, practical state of mind, and found her uncle, the Canon, enjoying his *villeggiatura* on the stone steps in front of the little house, wearing a straw hat and reading a novel. Below lay the tennis ground in dewy shadow ; below that, the brilliant and varied colour of a hedge of dahlias ; then a sort of little glen, all grass and oak trees ; and then the great wood. Altogether it was a peaceful and pleasant retreat. Celia wished her uncle good-morning, and stood beside him on the steps ; he looked up from his book benevolently.

‘ Well, Celia !’ he said, ‘ are you thinking, “ I am monarch of all I survey ” ? We quite acknowledge it, your aunt and I—

only don't turn us out of our house. Holm will have new charms when you are settled here.'

'Then I hope you mean to be here more than once a year,' said Celia, smiling. 'I have no taste for solitude. I shall want you dreadfully.'

'Don't let Paul hear that,' said the Canon. 'He wants nobody but you.'

'Paul is very young,' said Celia.

'Just the same age, are you not?'

'That means nothing.'

'By-the-bye, is he coming to breakfast?'

'No. Colonel Ward wanted him. He is coming here afterwards.'

'Rather ill-advised of the worthy Colonel. Very funny, Paul's affection for that old fellow,' said Canon Percival thoughtfully. 'I was quite uneasy, at one time: I thought he would turn Paul into as great an oddity

as himself. I assure you, Celia, if Colonel Ward had had his way, Paul would have spent his whole time at Red Towers, loitering about with him and his dogs. Wouldn't even have gone to college. Most absurd, and very wrong ; quite contrary to his father's wishes. Well, you know, the Colonel doesn't like me, simply because I set my face against all this nonsense of keeping the boy shut up, away from other young men. It was my duty, as Paul's guardian. Of course, I had no more power than Colonel Ward ; but I had your aunt on my side. That was a great thing.'

'Aunt Flo can do anything with the old Colonel, can't she ?'

'So she thinks. I don't know ; I hope so—for if he can give us any trouble, you may be sure that he will. I suspect he does not approve of Paul's marriage. I wrote

him a long letter about it the other day. I thought it was the proper thing to do. He has not vouchsafed me an answer.'

'But Paul is his own master now,' suggested Celia.

'Yes, yes, very true. But the Colonel can make himself troublesome. He has been mixed up so much, do you see, with the management of the property.'

'Oh, I don't think he will do much harm. Now breakfast is ready. Here are Aunt Flo and Toto coming to call us.'

Paul had been having his breakfast with Colonel Ward in the dark low dining-room at the Cottage, where the dogs sat all round and waited for their turn. The Colonel's household arrangements were of the simplest kind; they were not unlike those of Dr. Riccabocca, only, if possible, simpler still, the only servant who lived in the house with

him being a straight and correct young man named Bartholomew, commonly called Barty, who had been a soldier, and might have been a Frenchman, from his genius as cook, valet, housemaid, and gardener. Not that these talents were in requisition every day. An old woman who lived on the common—ugly, clever, and respectable—was nominally Colonel Ward's housekeeper, and spent most of her time at the Cottage.

Nothing could be plainer than the little old-fashioned rooms, with their well-worn furniture, where the six dogs lay in a row on the hearth in winter, and in their favourite corners in summer. They were all one family; the Colonel's breed of Clumber spaniels was well known in that part of the world.

The uninitiated were wont to see nothing at first but a heap of white, curly, satiny

backs and legs, more or less varied with golden brown, half a dozen white faces, more or less mild, affectionate, melancholy, with drooping ears, long and fringed, and eyes, light golden brown, so touching in their wistful gaze that they might have melted the stoniest heart. This collective impression was all nonsense, and nothing enraged Colonel Ward so much as to hear it put into words.

They were very happy dogs, and their characters were just as varied as those of a family of children. Besides, they were by no means equal in beauty, or in the appearance of good breeding, though all equally well-bred. Dick and Di, the father and mother of the flock, were the perfection of Clumber beauty, carrying the 'shilling mark' on their heads which stamps the breed. Two of the puppies—Jack and Jess—also



bore this distinction ; but Punch and Judy were unfortunately and unaccountably without it.

The Colonel was ashamed of them, and so was Barty ; but Mrs. Perks, the house-keeper, gave it as her opinion that they were much happier without it. Certain it is that they were the most cheerful of the party, and full of careless impertinence, leaving dignity to their father and mother, and melancholy to their more distinguished brother and sister, who, especially Jess, were of all young dogs the saddest. ‘ *Noblesse oblige*,’ these dogs seemed keenly to feel ; they never did anything wrong, and their greatness weighed upon them. But the flower of the family was no doubt Di ; she had in consequence the best of everything, and none of her companions dreamed of being jealous, or of disputing her pre-eminence. The other

dogs were sometimes left at home, or shut up out of the way. Di was her master's dearest friend ; she slept in his room, and he was never seen without her. The thick white satin of her coat, with its stiff curl, was perfection ; her marks were the right shade of brown ; her eyes with their golden-tinted depths were full of soul and tenderness. Dick was very handsome too, but he was a heavy, uninteresting dog compared with Di. He knew this, no doubt ; he admired her loyally, like a gentleman, and did not resent their master's favouritism, but contented himself with violently snubbing the pretentious Punch, and generally setting a dignified example to the puppies.

Paul and the Colonel and this family had breakfast very comfortably together, Paul's little Scamp having been left at home ; the Clumbers were ready to play with him out-

of-doors, but did not care for his company in their own dining-room, where each had its own place, Di perched on a footstool at her master's right hand. Di had a charmingly high-bred way of pretending not to be hungry, and playing with her food : the puppies never could imitate this, and Dick only tried to seem indifferent, betraying his anxiety in his eyes. Punch and Judy sometimes had to be turned out of the room ; then Di tossed her head scornfully, and played more than ever.

Colonel Ward was not very cheerful that morning ; he was silent and dull. Without the delightful behaviour of the dogs, and the serene intensity of happiness which shone in the face of Paul, the meal would have been a dismal one.

The Colonel's mind, in fact, was divided against itself. He wanted to rejoice with his friends—he was a solitary man, and had

few other friends—but he could not yet be reconciled to Paul's marrying Miss Darrell. Besides, there was the danger of inconsistency, for he remembered all that he had said to Paul on the subject, and supposed Paul must remember it too, perhaps resent it ; in this he was mistaken. Altogether, he was not comfortable in his mind, and rather avoided the subject till breakfast was nearly over. He had quite meant to have a very serious and interesting talk with Paul, and had asked him to breakfast with this in view ; but Paul gave signs of being too frivolously happy for any sort of business conversation.

The poor Colonel felt out of tune with his surroundings. At last he began :

‘ I suppose your engagement is no longer a secret ? ’

‘ You are right,’ the young man answered.  
‘ Everybody may know now.’

‘Percival thought it necessary to write me a grand letter about it the other day,’ said the Colonel. As he spoke, he threw Di a scrap of toast, and smiled at her frolics in receiving it.

Small yelps of impatience came from Punch and Judy, and the other puppies beat the floor with their tails. Dick alone lay motionless, looking at his master, with feelings too deep for expression.

After a pause the Colonel went on :

‘I didn’t answer his letter.’

‘Why not?’ said Paul.

‘What was I to say? He told me nothing that I did not know before. His own gratification and Mrs. Percival’s—was there any need for describing that? He wanted me to write a history about mine—rather too much to expect, as any other man would have felt. However, it is Percival all over

—ignoring any view but his own. Can't turn into a humbug, Paul, even to please you, or Mrs. Percival either.'

'We don't want you to do that,' said Paul. 'I dare say Canon Percival's letter did not want an answer. He never said anything to me about it. It doesn't matter; you will be civil to them now.'

'I suppose I must. Not ask them here? —I can't do that. Neither Mrs. Percival nor Miss Darrell would care to come to tea in a kennel, for instance,' said the Colonel, looking sharply round at his dog-family.

'You had better ask them, and hear what they say,' said Paul. 'They are very fond of dogs.'

He felt quietly convinced that the dear old Colonel was dying to make himself as agreeable as possible to the ladies, who certainly were quite ready to be friendly

with him. His holding aloof was the one thing that troubled Paul at this time, and he was sure that the prejudice would only be conquered by further acquaintance with Celia. He thought that the whole thing was to be traced to the Colonel's dislike of Canon Percival, a very old story. He could not dislike Celia herself; that idea was so ridiculous as to be impossible: and her want of fortune could never be a real objection to so unworldly a mind as the Colonel's.

Mrs. Percival was his old love, the object of his deepest admiration; he therefore certainly had no right to be surprised if her niece proved as attractive as herself.

‘What are you going to do this morning?’ asked Colonel Ward, still rather grumpily.

‘I am going to fetch Mrs. Percival and Miss Darrell, and we are going all over the

house, and so on, to see what alterations will be wanted.'

'Alterations !'

'Now, Colonel, if you were going to be married, you would want alterations here.'

'And my landlord would object, I dare say. Well, Paul, a guardian is a more important person than a landlord. One has only his own property to think about ; the other has somebody else's. And that's a serious affair, when the somebody is a foolish young fellow in love.'

'Come along, then, and give us your advice,' said Paul. 'Come with me now, or meet us at the house.'

'No, my lad ; I'll do neither one thing nor the other. You are of age ; you must manage your own affairs.'

'Oh yes, you must come,' said Paul.



‘ You know the house better than anybody. I shall tell them you are coming.’

‘ No, I’m not coming,’ the Colonel said.

He went out with Paul to the gate, and watched him as he rushed off along the sandy road towards Holm Lodge. The sun was shining on its red chimneys, from which faint blue wreaths of smoke were stealing ; up here on the high ground the air was clear and fresh, though a morning mist still lingered in the valleys ; the hills lay blue and purple against the paler sky. Down on the left lay the beautiful varied woods that surrounded Red Towers, changing gradually into the pinewoods below Holm Lodge ; to the right, the common, with its yellow dress of faded bracken, was bounded by larger and older pinewoods still. All the air was full of their scent, and there was perfect stillness everywhere. If the wild estate of Red

Towers had especially prepared itself to receive its new mistress, it could not have done so to more advantage.

Colonel Ward stood and watched the slight figure of the young squire, striding off in happy haste to meet his love, the only living thing to be seen in the bright lonely landscape. Till the young man had disappeared round the turn of the road, his old friend stood looking. Then he said aloud, 'It's all nonsense. The girl can't be good enough for him ;' and smote hard two or three times with his stick on the stones at the gate. This was the dogs' signal ; they came rushing out of the house in a body, and their master started off at once for a walk with them, up the hill, under the wild banks, where one or two great rugged firs overhung the road, past the deeply-shaded gate of Red Towers, up the road

beyond, which ran brown and damp through the very middle of the dark tall wood, on its way to higher hills and wilder commons, and great shining views stretching away to the sea.





## CHAPTER IX.

### NEW CONQUESTS.

CELIA DARRELL and her aunt Mrs. Percival were people to whom is applied that ill-used word 'artistic.' They understood the happy union of art and fashion in furniture, and could talk the jargon of all this, though their views were not, for various reasons, carried out very logically at River Gate. Paul Romaine's quaint old house was a delightfully suggestive field for them. He had been quite right in his idea of doing up the house ; not one room could be left as it was ; but fortunately he was sincere and eager in

his wish to spend any amount of money on it, to make it really pretty for Celia. She and her aunt spent two hours that morning very pleasantly in wandering through the rooms—the shady, quiet, brown old rooms—planning new furniture and new decorations, with Paul in attendance, obedient to Celia's every look, and smile, and word. He had not much opinion of his own on these subjects, and was quite sure that from Celia's taste there could be no appeal. With anyone else he would have had something to say on the fitness of things, and would instinctively have scoffed at the notion of furnishing his old country house in the modern 'high art' style of a suburban villa. For Paul's taste was naturally excellent, and he inherited from his mother, who had lived at Red Towers, a kind of cultivation very superior to that of the women who were now

pulling her arrangements to pieces. But the quiet daylight of Paul's natural mind was at present lost in the dazzling radiance of Celia. She must have her own way ; he must follow her, as she followed the fashion. Only, like another young hero we have read of, ' he would have real marble in place of stucco, and, if he might, perhaps solid gold for gilding : ' that is, the modern equivalent of these things ; ebony, for instance, instead of ebonized wood, though Mrs. Percival sweetly told him that he would ruin himself. She and Celia wandered from room to room, imagining, suggesting, trying effects, while a soft sun streamed in at the tall old windows, and all the pictures listened sadly. Sabin, also, who came smiling in to move some furniture, went back to his wife with doubtful shakes of the head. Paul, devoted as he was, found it a relief, when Mrs. Percival

had made notes enough to content her as a beginning, and when he began to see a chance of taking Celia away into the garden and the woods, her aunt showing signs of being considerably tired. In the garden the noble old cedars could hardly be expected to give up their place to any trees of more perfect form, or more satisfying colour, or anyhow of a higher order in creation. Here there was no terra-cotta, except ancient red bricks with the extra baking and decorating of time ; no peacock blue, except what flashed and shimmered in the peacock's tail as he strayed across a sunny distance of lawn.

Mrs. Percival sat down in the study, and sent for Mrs. Sabin to talk to her, with an idea of further independent excursions by-and-by. From the study window she could see the two young people going slowly away from the house in the shade of the cedars.

They were a very nice-looking couple, certainly : no doubt it would be all right, thought Mrs. Percival.

Celia was just the girl to appreciate at their fullest value all the good things of this life ; she loved everything that was pretty ; there was no doubt that her house would be charming, and that she would keep it so ; only—would she ever be dull ? And then, what would she do, and what would Paul do ? For their characters had not the harmony of their looks ; Mrs. Percival knew this well, and it made her secretly uneasy now and then.

The Vincent affair remained on her mind unpleasantly, too ; it had seemed to bring out a certain heartlessness in Celia, or, at least, a pretence at heartlessness, for Mrs. Percival was very sure that she was more troubled than she chose to show. But, to



all appearance, nothing could have been more perfect than her content with Paul and the future, ever since Vincent went away.

It was a lovely old garden. Near the house it had a certain stiffness of long walks with stone steps, clipped yews, and a fish-pond. All about the lawn, which sloped down to this, were long flower-beds, which the bad taste of the old gardener, the ignorance of Colonel Ward, and the carelessness of the Squire, had caused to be arranged in dazzling bands of red, yellow, and blue.

In the early summer there were plenty of old-fashioned roses, but they were nearly all gone now. Below the pond and the yew-hedges, a gate led straight into the deep mazes of the wood.

Paul was full of happy excitement as he took Celia all about the garden, and showed

her what he thought the prettiest corners. It was the first time that they had been here alone together ; of course she had seen it all last autumn, but that, to Paul, was a former state of existence, and a very poor, and cold, and dull one. To be sure, he was in love with her then ; so far that he was never happy or at rest for a moment, unless Miss Darrell in her black dress, pale, sometimes a little thoughtful, but generally smiling and *dégagée*, was somewhere within sight. But then he had hardly dared to dream of her ever really belonging to him ; or, rather—for Paul's instincts were generous, even when he was in love—of his belonging to her : himself, and all that he had in the world, given to her service for ever.

Since then he had learnt a great many things ; at least he thought so ; like other such trustful natures, having no idea of the

depth of his own ignorance, or of all that Celia was yet to teach him. At present she had taught him nothing, being herself practical, hard, and happy, not even knowing, as she had truthfully told her aunt, what love was, till Vincent, the other day, brought her the first beginning of that terrible knowledge.

Celia laughed at Paul, very sweetly, for his evident delight in getting away into the garden.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you have got away from Aunt Flo, and paint and paper and all that, but you haven’t got away from me. I am just as tiresome as she is. You think the garden perfect, poor dear, as well as the house, and I shall be quite horrid if I tell you that those geraniums and calceolarias are utterly ghastly.’

‘Are they? Yes, I suppose they are,’ said Paul a little absently.

‘Yes, loathsome,’ said Celia, looking up with her most charming smile. ‘Not quite so loathsome as a stuffy room crammed with books, like your dear study, where we left poor Aunt Flo just now. I saw her eyes wandering over the bookcase, Paul, with feelings like my own. That would make such a jolly little morning-room, done with terra-cotta and black, and with shelves running all round for china.’

‘And some draperies, and Japanese screens, and yellow drain-pipes with bulrushes sticking out of them,’ said Paul, smiling faintly, as he stood by the gate and gazed down into the glowing depth of the wood.

Celia looked at him, smiling her sweetest, her eyes intensely blue.

‘You are getting on very nicely,’ she said. ‘I shall be quite proud of you in time.’

He looked round at her with an expression

that was rather new to him, and made her feel a little grave in spite of herself.

‘Do you really want the study?’ he said. ‘Then you shall have it, and do what you like with it. You ought to know already that the whole thing is yours to do what you like with.’

She answered him with a sudden earnestness almost equal to his own.

‘Don’t make me worse than I am, Paul. You ought to see when I mean things and when I don’t. Don’t you know that I can be perfectly happy in the dear old house as it is, without anything being done to it at all? I can indeed, and I will, if it makes you the least unhappy. As to the study, I wouldn’t have it touched for worlds.’

It was a very quiet, shady corner down there by the gate into the wood; and Celia

let Paul thank her in his own way. Presently she said to him softly :

‘ Do you know that you are spoiling me ? and that I am not half good enough for you in any way. No ; listen. I was not brought up as nicely as some girls, and I’ve got nothing ; and you ought to marry a different sort of girl, you know. And you are doing all this for me just as if I was a grand young woman and a very good match. And really—you ought not to give in to me in the way you do—it is more terribly spoiling than I can tell you. I thought so in the house just now. It is so sweet of you ; but it isn’t at all a good thing. Paul, I sometimes feel so sure that you won’t be happy with me.’

‘ What makes you talk like this ? What utter nonsense !’ murmured Paul in his happiness.

‘ I don’t know,’ she said. ‘ You are so

good—it makes one feel that you ought to know the truth, I suppose. You ought to know that you are making a mistake—won't you believe it ?

‘No,’ he said quietly. ‘I happen to know better.’

When Celia thought of the little scene afterwards she was startled at herself. It seemed to show that the strongest nature might lose its balance and be affected by foolish outside things—even by such a very foolish thing as the generous, devoted love of a boy. For though Paul was much taller than herself, and in truth much cleverer and much wiser, she could never think of him as anything but a boy. But the simple nobleness of his love for her seemed to raise up something in her nature that had not been there before—some generosity to meet his, some painful consciousness of all that he

was giving for such a poor return. At that moment, in a way, she certainly liked Paul better than she had ever liked him before ; and yet his touch became unbearable—a sort of fear, born of her own falseness, made her eyes droop before his, and in this first stroll with him round the garden at Red Towers, she was very near obeying some angel's voice—such as can sometimes speak even to Celia—and breaking off her engagement altogether.

‘Not into the wood now, please,’ she said, as Paul was opening the gate. ‘I thought you were going to show me the stables.’

‘Well, you know, the stables are a serious subject,’ he said rather shyly. ‘They are very much worse than the house, I must tell you, and I’m not sure that they won’t want rebuilding altogether. There’s nothing there but the pony, and Ford keeps it all as tidy



as he can ; but Colonel Ward thinks there's something wrong in the construction, which I don't understand. If you would let him show you, and explain it all—but of course you would understand, because you know about horses, and I don't, you see.'

'Why didn't Colonel Ward teach you?'

'I don't know. I suppose I was too stupid to learn. It doesn't matter,' said Paul. 'You will have to manage all that, if you don't mind.'

'That will be beyond me,' said Celia, though her eyes shone at the prospect. 'I can ride and drive, certainly ; but I can't quite take the situation of coachman, sir. I believe I could choose a horse—at any rate. for such a trusting master as you ; but I'm afraid of your Colonel, do you know. He isn't as nice as you. He doesn't like me.'

‘The dear old boy hardly knows you,’ said Paul. ‘If you choose him to like you, of course he will.’

‘Have I such a strong will as that, do you think?’

‘I don’t know. I think you can do anything you like. Perhaps it is not will exactly.’

‘I have been told I could do it by electricity,’ said Celia; she had quite recovered herself now, and they were walking round into the stable-yard. She smiled as she spoke, and remembered who it was who had talked to her about her magnetic powers. He knew something about them, perhaps—but not poor Paul.

‘Well, I will try to do something very hard,’ she said, still smiling. ‘I will try to make Colonel Ward like me better than he likes you.’

‘ All right. You’ll succeed, no doubt ; and I shall be awfully glad if you do.’

‘ If I take away your only friend, Paul ?’

‘ You won’t do that,’ he said.

‘ How do you know ? Somebody once told me I was a witch, and witches are always doing mischief of that kind. Suppose I was really a nasty, malicious witch, and tried to make you and the Colonel hate each other.’

‘ I don’t think you could do that,’ said Paul rather thoughtfully.

‘ So there is a limit to my power, is there ?’

‘ You couldn’t do what you couldn’t.’

‘ What language for a man who has taken a degree like yours ! I understand you though—thank you, Paul. You don’t believe I have it in me to do anything really vicious.’

He laughed. 'Make the Colonel like you as much as you please,' he said, pushing open the old yard door.

Whatever faults there may have been in the stable-yard at Red Towers, it was charming to look at; it was almost the prettiest part of the old precincts of the place. The old buildings, with their red, time-worn gables, and beetling eaves, and turrets, round which pigeons were flying, looked down with a grand air on the broad grass-grown court below.

Two or three great overhanging chestnut trees, their stems hidden behind walls, their large leaves touched with yellow, laid deep shadow across half the yard, where an old retriever lay asleep by his kennel. It all looked unused, lonely, yet not neglected; ivy and Virginia creeper had their way there, as everywhere else about the place,

wreathing the long old stable-roof in lovely confusion. Doors stood open into silent darkness, except in another small stable, where the one fat pony of the establishment lived at his ease.

A smart little dog-cart was pulled out of the coach-house, where three or four old-fashioned carriages reposed in shadow, and a clinking sound came from the saddle-room, where Ford was cleaning harness.

Moss on the roofs, grass between the stones, chickens wandering in and out of those open useless doors—altogether it was evidently a yard belonging to a master who found none of his happiness in horses.

Ford looked out of his door with as much interest and excitement as his steady old mind was capable of, and no little anxiety too. The news of the Squire's engagement had only just reached his servants, and they

were of course very glad, not having had time to fear the loss of their situations. Old servants do not at once realize that an old place can get on without them. At the same time, Miss Darrell brought with her a character rather alarming to people in Ford's line. Everyone knew who and what her father had been ; with all his faults, about the best judge of a horse to be found in England. He was an authority on all racing matters ; his stud-farm was famous ; his stud-groom a hero of his kind ; he had won many races, and his stable arrangements were the admiration of all those who understood these things. He himself was a daring rider, and had been a very popular man, with something, for some people, of his daughter's charm. Poor Tom Darrell ! he was dead ; and before he died he had gone to the dogs very completely. His old friends did not

talk about him much ; but his name was likely to linger long in the mouths of grooms and jockeys, for he was a master in their craft. Colonel Ward used to allow Ford to talk about him, and to quote him as an authority, for Ford had visited his stables in days gone by ; but the Colonel always ended by making him a text for moral reflections, not much needed by Ford, the steadiest of the steady, but taken with respect from a man who, in his quiet way, knew as much about horses as Captain Darrell himself.

Of course, Ford despised Mr. Romaine nearly as much as he loved him, and was often heard to complain of being utterly thrown away in his service. Sir Paul had been a splendid master, and it was only for his sake, and to keep up the credit of Red Towers as far as possible, that Ford had persuaded himself to stay on. The Colonel,

to be sure, was some comfort ; but the poor dear young gentleman was enough to break one's heart. When Ford first heard that his master was going to marry Captain Darrell's daughter, he looked very grave, and asked Colonel Ward's man if the young lady knew that the Squire couldn't so much as saddle a horse, much less ride one, much less tell a thoroughbred when he saw him ; that he would not drive the old pony if he could help it, and if he did, was sure to run into the gate-post. At first, Ford could not at all swallow the incongruity of such a marriage ; but presently, by converse with the more brilliant Barty, he began to see that it might be a blessing, and a way for Red Towers to regain its character, and for himself to rise in the estimation of all who knew him. The more he thought of it, the more he was inclined to respect his new



mistress, and he looked out with painful anxiety, when the Squire brought her into the yard that morning, to see what impression those empty stalls would make on a mind so full of knowledge.

Then Mr. Romaine called him out of the saddle-room.

‘Look here, Ford ; I want you to show Miss Darrell the stables. I dare say she will ask some questions, and you can answer them better than I can.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Ford. He glanced at Miss Darrell with deep approval ; her appearance was what he called neat, and impressed him very favourably.

‘Stood there smiling,’ he told Barty afterwards, ‘and as if she’d stand no nonsense. Just the look I’ve seen on the Captain’s face, when things in general was going right, and new plans was coming into

his head. Just those same beautiful blue eyes, too. That young lady will have her own way, mind you, and with other things as well as horses, mark my words ! Master Paul,' said Ford with a tinge of sadness, 'he ain't no match for her, bless you ! But I expect he's sharp enough to know it.'

'Beg your pardon, sir,' said Ford, touching his cap a second or third time to Celia, 'there ain't much to see in empty stables. I do my best, as the Colonel knows ; but there ain't any pride or satisfaction in it.'

'The stables won't be empty long,' said his master. 'Show Miss Darrell where the horses are to be. We shall see whether she agrees with the Colonel that the whole thing must be pulled down.'

'I don't see the necessity myself, miss,' said Ford. 'The Colonel's very particular ; but Sir Paul was satisfied, and our horses

was some of the best in the county, just as they will be again. But you'll know best, miss, if you'll please to look round.'

'Thank you, Ford,' said Celia, very graciously. 'I am sure you know all about it. What a pretty little cart you have got there!'

'Latest improvement in the shaft, miss ; but it ain't new to you, I expect.'

Paul stood by smiling with amusement, while Ford, quite carried out of his usual solemnity, conducted Celia round his premises, asking her opinion at every step. She checked him a little, laughing and turning away, when he began to wonder how many horses he had better look out for ; what new carriages would be wanted ; what helpers had better be engaged.

'Quite right, Ford ; you shall know all about it in a day or two,' said Paul. 'I

shall talk it over with the Colonel. Only, whatever you do, don't fetch me out to look at horses.'

'No, sir,' said Ford, grinning from ear to ear. 'But perhaps Miss Darrell will be pleased to give her opinion.'

'I hope she will. One day last year we thought we wanted a horse,' said Paul to Celia, 'and a man brought one here to be looked at. The Colonel happened to be away, and Ford sent for me. I don't think he will ever do it again. I suppose I had some idea of not being a disgrace to him, so I began making remarks on this animal. And the result was not satisfactory; was it, Ford?'

'No, sir. Yes, miss,' said Ford, turning confidentially to his new friend. 'I was uncommon glad when my master said he didn't like the beast, and walked off. The

fellow that brought him here knew what I thought of him. I didn't fancy him either ; but my reasons was different.'

'What were your reasons, Ford ?' asked Celia. 'I dare say I should have agreed with you.'

'No manner of doubt you would, miss. But I'll say no more, if you please, though it's safe enough, as names hasn't been mentioned,' said Ford, with the caution of his craft.

While they stood talking there in the shade of the chestnuts, Ford wondering more and more how such a beautiful and clever young lady came to fancy his master—a master with such defects, and not even the grace to be ashamed of them—a great patter outside the large gates announced a party of some kind. They flew open, and Colonel Ward came in, his six dogs

rushing before him, and tearing round the yard.

All but Di : she trotted straight to Celia Darrell, where she stood by Paul, looked imploringly up in her face for a moment, and then lay down at her feet. Dogs will sometimes do these unaccountable and unreasonable things. Di, when she did them, was irresistible ; and Celia, apparently, found her so. She knelt suddenly down on the ground for a moment, put her arm round the dog's neck, and kissed the white curly head ; then rising up instantly, with a faint flush and her prettiest smile, she went forward to shake hands with Di's master. Paul's first look, as he stood by and saw this little demonstration, was one of horror. Mrs. Percival was always kissing her little dogs ; but Celia never kissed them, and Paul had often rejoiced thankfully that she did not.

Dogs always obeyed her, and she treated them with a sort of cool kindness. Di, as far as Paul knew, was the first dog who had ever laid claim to an outward sign of her love, and received it ; but even Di was not good enough to be kissed by Celia. Paul was sensitive and fanciful about these things—a muff, we must repeat—and he felt that kiss like a degradation. But then he looked at his old friend the Colonel, and he saw that the stern grey face was full of smiles and softness ; evidently—had Celia divined it ?—the way to his heart was through the hearts of his dogs.

‘ Di will be a proud dog for ever, Miss Darrell,’ the Colonel was saying.

His hat was off ; he bent his cropped grey head very low over Celia’s hand, almost touching it with his moustache. A courtly old Frenchman could not have paid

homage more gracefully to the future mistress of Red Towers.

‘They are such beautiful dogs,’ murmured Celia, half laughing; ‘and that one is a perfect darling.’

‘I am delighted that you admire them. May I say—Paul is a fortunate fellow. I meant to do myself the honour of calling on Mrs. Percival and you this afternoon——’

‘She is here now; she is in the house,’ said Celia. ‘Shall we go to her?’

‘We have been making all sorts of plans,’ said Paul. ‘I wish you had come a little sooner, Colonel. We have been overhauling the stables and coach-house.’

‘Then you certainly did want me. Never mind; we must do it again. Come here, dogs. Miss Darrell, will you accept one of these dogs? Dick and Di won’t leave their old master——’



‘Are you so sure about Di, Colonel?’ said Paul, rather mischievously. ‘She seemed inclined to give herself away, just now.’

‘Di is perfectly lovely, and so nice to stroke,’ said Celia softly, laying her hand on the dog’s head. ‘But they are all delightful,’ as she stood in the middle of the white, curly crowd—everybody forgetting, as perhaps she did herself, that she had laughed last year at the Colonel’s flock of woolly lambs. ‘But if you really mean it, Colonel Ward, and if I may choose—come here, you pretty shy thing; what is your name?’

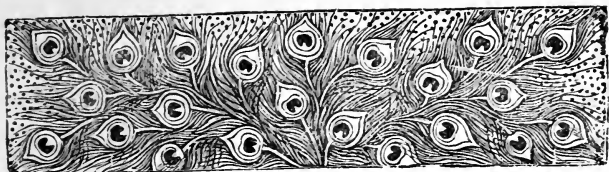
‘He is Jack,’ said the Colonel, ‘or whatever you like to call your dog. Well, yes, he is a good dog; he has the shilling mark, you see; he’s all right. He’s rather a dismal, low-spirited fellow; that’s the worst of him.’

‘He wants petting, that’s all,’ said Celia,

who had now taken Jack's head between her hands, and was looking into his mournful eyes. 'He has a great deal of character ; but it wants bringing out. You have too many of them, Colonel Ward ; you can't study each one separately, as I shall study Jack.'

'Jack is a lucky dog,' said the Colonel decisively.

Ford held open the gate for all these visitors to pass through. Colonel Ward lingered a moment to call Punch and Judy, who had run off to play with the old retriever. Celia turned round and looked at Paul with eyes full of laughter. She did not speak, but her eyes said : 'What do you think now ? Am I a witch ?'



## CHAPTER X.

### AUTUMN MISTS.

CELIA'S sudden and triumphant conquest of Colonel Ward might really have seemed a little unnatural to anyone less infatuated than Paul. He had two very easy explanations of it ; one supplied by love, the other by friendship. Celia was, of course, irresistible. And the Colonel was only too glad to be conquered, to be justified in a real hearty admiration for Paul's future wife. His objections had only come from a mistaken sense of duty ; he was delighted to find what nonsense they were. He made no

explanation of his change of tactics—to Paul, the Canon, or anybody ; but from henceforth, from the day that he presented Celia with one of his favourite Clumbers, he was her devoted slave.

Paul himself, a young man without experience, could not reach the pitch of Colonel Ward's thoughtful worship. The Colonel suggested that a horse should be bought at once for Celia. Paul, of course, was only too happy, though this present of his carried her away from him for hours together, generally with two elderly cavaliers—the Colonel and the Canon. Then the Colonel threw himself, with all his good practical sense, into the entire restoration and reformation of the old house ; none of Mrs. Percival's views were too much for him ; his old affection for her, his new affection for Celia, carried him over mountains of ancient pre-

judice and difficulty. Paul began to find himself left behind in this race too. Then Celia thought the place was a little too shady, and one day Paul found the Colonel busy marking some of his finest trees. Then a faint shade of annoyance appeared on his pale face.

‘What are you doing, Colonel?’ he said gently. ‘Those trees are not coming down.’

‘I think you will find they are, my boy,’ said the Colonel. ‘Miss Darrell objects to a mass of shade just here, and she is quite right.’

Paul said no more, and the Colonel went on with his marking.

September and October seemed to glide very swiftly away. It was a beautiful autumn, still and calm; excellent weather for the workmen in and out of Red Towers,

who had soon turned the peaceful old place into a desert of dust and scaffolding. Everybody was very happy ; not even Sabin and his wife had any doubts of their future, which seemed to them a great deal more assured than it really was. The Canon, having enjoyed as much shooting as he cared for and some pleasant rides, went back refreshed, after a month's holiday, to his parish at Woolsborough. In his mind, his fellow-guardian's unexpected good behaviour was all owing to that masterly letter of his, unanswered because unanswerable, but justified by results. Mrs. Percival and Celia stayed on for the present at Holm Lodge, where they had everything to occupy and amuse them. Paul, the happy lover, his marriage being fixed for January, moved himself and his small goods across the road to Colonel Ward's cottage, where he spent his

nights, living in a dream, he did not always quite know where.

And Celia was radiant. In that pure, high air of the pine-woods, she grew stronger and more beautiful every day. It had always been her wise way to extract all possible enjoyment out of life, even at its dullest, without making herself dependent on anybody or anything. She had never been bored, she had always been cheerful and contented ; and now she was more than contented, she was very much pleased with herself and all her surroundings. She enjoyed making the Colonel talk nonsense, and follow her about till her aunt was almost jealous ; she liked the deference of the old servants, especially Ford, the curious admiration that stared out of the village faces, the murmurs among the workmen as she walked about with Paul. She liked her rides, her journeys up to town,

her unlimited power of indulging every fancy; the merest hint of a wish was enough, either to Paul or the Colonel, though Paul, very wrongly, was sometimes a little the stupidest of the two.

In her better moments she liked Paul, and pitied him rather; sometimes she caught herself almost forgetting that, after all, he was the centre of this new life of hers, for here at Holm, as the weeks went on, he was not a very exacting lover. He was beginning, in truth, to have a certain fear of teasing Celia, of giving her too much of himself and his views. She always seemed to be surrounded with plans and patterns, or plunged in mysterious talks with her aunt, or making arrangements with the Colonel, and asking his advice. The days when she wanted defending against the Colonel had almost been pleasanter, though Paul would never



have confessed it to himself. Now, in truth, she seemed to have done what she laughingly suggested that first day—taken away Paul's only friend : witness that little scene of marking the trees, Paul's own old trees, without even the form of consulting him. Something in Paul rebelled at that ; a voice spoke to him, but he would not listen, because, after all, the Colonel was doing it for Celia. And generally, not quite always, she herself took the trouble of driving away any little accidental shadow that crossed Paul's mind.

But the most beautiful time in a human life must have its drawbacks, and Paul would have laughed angrily at anyone who told him that these autumn weeks were not perfectly glorious. In all but a few lonely minutes sometimes, he knew that they were. He did love Celia better than himself ; he was not selfish, or jealous, or ungenerous.

If sometimes he knew that his absence would please her better than his presence—why, it was only that Sunday at Woolsborough over again. He knew he was rather a helpless fellow, ignorant about horses, curtains, and dados ; and all these things must be arranged. Celia must please herself thoroughly about all these things ; and some day, some happy day next year, when the confusion was over, and workpeople and shops were done with, and they were living together in their beautiful house, she would let him read poetry to her, or play to her on the organ that he meant to have in the library ; and then they would come out together on the lawn, the moon shining through the cedars, and stand where he was standing now ; and she would really belong to him then, and he would ask her if she was happy. Then a great owl floated slowly from one cedar to

another, from darkness into moonlight, and into darkness again, and hooted his melancholy good-night to the young Squire.

At the end of October, in spite of sunshine, the short days were growing cold, and, to civilized beings like Mrs. Percival and Celia, the common and woods of Holm began to seem a little dull and wintry. So, everything being in train at Red Towers, and going forward to their satisfaction, they made their plans for going away.

Celia's marriage was to be a gay one, and the preparations for it wanted a great deal of time and thought, and could not be carried on at all at Holm Lodge. They were therefore going to London, and then down to Woolsborough for a few days, and then to Paris for their chief shopping, which, in Mrs. Percival's opinion, could be done nowhere else.

On their last day at Holm, they had promised to come to tea with Colonel Ward and Paul at the Cottage. It was a cold, bright, quiet afternoon, with a suggestion of frost in the air, and all the woods not ever-green were massed in many shades of brown, and red, and gold. Paul and the Colonel had been loitering about that afternoon in the ruins of Red Towers, and came back in a hurry, covered with dust, to receive their visitors. The Colonel was inclined also to be cross with the workmen for idleness.

‘ Done by Christmas ! Nonsense—no such thing ! ’ he came back muttering.

Paul also was not in good spirits. It was all right, of course, that the house should be pulled to pieces, but he could not, like other people, enjoy the process while it went on. After an hour or two spent in those dismantled rooms, he generally felt an intenser

longing than usual for the presence of Celia, for whose sake alone his quiet old house was given up to the restorers.

It was a dreadful thought that she was going away to-morrow ; these works without her would lose their meaning, and become nothing but a devastation. He started off that afternoon to meet her and Mrs. Percival, with a kind of weight at his heart, which appeared to him to be simply the want of Celia.

The road along the common, going from Red Towers towards Holm, and passing Holm Lodge close to the lower gate of the common, dips suddenly below Colonel Ward's cottage, and is bordered by rugged sandy banks, with narrow footpaths worn by sheep and children. Then the road rises again ; but still the level of the common is higher, though to the right of the road it shelves

slightly down from this inhabited side of it towards the great fir-wood, which covers all the hill-side and runs down into the farther valley. The common—its green spaces eaten close by the cows and sheep that graze there, and covered thickly, for the rest of it, with furze and bracken, and low-tangled briars, and cushions of heather now dead and dry—is a network of small paths, or tracks merely, leading this way and that, from one broader way to another, in and out of the wood. As to the wood itself, younger trees stand here and there, pushing their way out into the common, veiling the entrances, many and winding, to the inner halls and aisles of what is worthy to be called a forest.

Paul, leaving the Colonel's cottage, did not keep the level of the road, but mounted the bank, and made his way with long light steps on the rugged edge of it. So it hap-

pened that, looking over the common to his right, he saw something white running among the brown bracken, and wondered if one of the Colonel's dogs—Punch, probably—had taken to bad ways and gone out without leave.

But then he saw a slight grey figure, with a grey hat, appear suddenly from behind two or three young fir-trees, and hurry on towards the darkest, loneliest, steepest part of the wood. It was Celia: he knew that soft grey dress well. She was carrying something white in her hand, something that looked like an open letter, and it was her faithful servant Jack, of course, who was running before her in the undergrowth.

Paul stood still. She did not turn her head or see him; she went on, in and out among the dark fir-stems, until the common

disappeared in the wood, and she, Paul still looking after her, disappeared too. His first impulse had been of course to overtake her ; as a rule, she never went into the woods alone ; those woods, as everyone knows, are too near London to have a very good name, though Colonel Ward for several years did all he could to discourage tramps and bad characters. But as some instinct had said to Paul once before, that Saturday evening, when he thought of taking a canoe and going to meet Celia and her cousin—‘ She would rather I did not,’ so it said now— ‘ She does not want me,’ and Paul, with a puzzled mind, hurried on to the Lodge to meet Mrs. Percival.

He found her sitting by the fire in her pretty little drawing-room, absorbed in some letters which had come by the second post, and particularly a long one from Vincent.



She seemed quite comfortable, and not inclined to move.

‘But we thought you were coming to tea with us,’ said Paul. ‘And Celia—I saw her in the distance just now, going into the wood. It was Celia—I couldn’t be mistaken?’

‘Oh, I dare say,’ said Mrs. Percival. ‘Why didn’t you run after her, or call her back? She went out for a walk some time ago, before the post came. I wish she would come back, for these are things that want answering. Yes, of course we were coming to tea with you and the Colonel. I didn’t know it was so late. Why did you let Celia escape, dear boy? She may have forgotten all about it.’

‘She wouldn’t forget,’ said Paul. Then he added, in excuse for himself: ‘She looked rather as if she wanted to escape, so I thought I would not follow her.’

‘ Oh, nonsense ! She has been very cold all day. She was running about with the dog to warm herself.’

Then Mrs. Percival threw aside her letters, came to Paul, where he was standing disconsolate by the window, and laid her hand kindly on his shoulder.

‘ I know who is too sensitive for his own happiness,’ she said. ‘ You are doing all you can, dear, to make Celia a most happy and fortunate girl, and you are succeeding brilliantly. But Paul, you would be happier yourself if you took things as she does, without too much thoughtfulness. You must not lay all your own rights and wishes entirely at her feet, and worship her like an idol, and blot yourself out of existence altogether. It is a little morbid to be always studying her, and fancying, “ What will she think ?” It is not good for you or for her.

Paul, you should learn to trust Celia in the same way that she trusts you. Does she ever think that you want to escape from her, for instance ?

A smile came into Paul's dark face, which had been sad enough just before.

‘That is absurd and impossible,’ he said. ‘She couldn't think that.’

‘Then go,’ said Mrs. Percival, patting his shoulder. ‘You saw which way she went ; go and bring her back to the Cottage. Don't wait to walk with me. I will take care of the Colonel, and keep some tea for you two silly children, if you are at all long. But don't be long ; it is cold in the woods.’

‘What a child he is !’ Mrs. Percival moralized rather sadly, as Paul rushed past the window on his way to the woods. ‘Many boys of seventeen are older. I hope Celia will

make him happy. I hope she appreciates him. I wish he was not a little too nice for her. They will not always have me to keep things straight.'

The air was very clear and full of yellow light, and the shadows were growing long, as Paul crossed the common and went into the wood, now a great temple with golden pillars, and a dark roof through which a thousand stars were shining.

It was not till he was really in the wood that he thought how difficult it would be to find Celia. She might have taken any one of twenty ways : the soft, deep paths, with their carpet of pine-needles, crossed each other constantly, leading away in all directions. Here and there was a clearing, where trees had been cut down ; beyond these there were cart-tracks.

Most of the wood was carpeted with oak

scrub and whortle-bushes, growing close to the ground among the tall pine-stems, and making it difficult to see through any extent of the long colonnades of trees.

Paul whistled loudly as he followed one of the paths, thinking that Jack might hear and understand, if Celia did not ; but his whistle brought no reply ; and perhaps for half an hour he searched about in vain. Then it struck him to take the shortest way across the wood, down into the valley on the north side, where there were a few cottages. It was the prettiest bit of the wood. He had taken Celia there one day and told her it was like Switzerland ; the trees were very large and tall, growing up on wild sandy banks about the path, which went winding down almost precipitously.

Far below lay the little valley, with a stream dancing in the hollow, and blue wood-

smoke stealing up from half-hidden chimneys. Two or three goats and small active cows found a living on these slopes and ledges ; one of them carried a tinkling bell. This, and the smell of the pines, and the musical trickle of water, gave a real Alpine feeling to that corner of Paul's wood ; one expected to meet a dark-faced boy with a long stick and a rose in his hat, singing as he came to drive the cattle home.

Following the path that led to this, Paul presently came in sight of Celia, sitting above the path at the foot of one of the largest trees, with the glory of the evening light shining full upon her and upon Jack as he lay close by.

She was sitting perfectly still, gazing down into the valley, and she held an open letter in her hand.

It seemed to Paul that she looked strangely

pale and sad ; but when he reached her, on the contrary, she was flushed, and began to laugh. The paths were so soft that she only heard him coming when he was actually climbing up to her perch above the pathway ; the lifting of Jack's long ears, and wagging of his tail, had passed quite unnoticed by her. But Paul, coming to her side, saw no letter, and thought for a moment that his eyes must have deceived him. Then he very naturally forgot this trifling circumstance.

Celia laughed, but she did not look pleased or happy.

‘ What is it, Paul ? What do you want ? ’ she said, and her manner was certainly cold ; his instinct had not quite deceived him after all.

‘ I want you to come to tea at the Cottage, ’ he said. ‘ I have been looking for you for

the last half-hour. You had not forgotten, had you ?

‘ Oh, bother !’ said Celia.

What would have been supremely ugly from any other lips was almost pretty from hers.

‘ Don’t you want to come ?’ he said. He had thrown himself down beside her on a cushion of ling, and was looking up with eyes not unlike Jack’s in their wistfulness.

‘ Don’t look at me like that,’ she said, ‘ as if I was going to beat you ;’ and she laughed again, and turned her head towards the valley.

Paul was silent : his eyes fell, and studied the ground till she spoke again.

‘ The Colonel is a darling, of course, but one might have a little too much of him. I suppose he won’t manage all our affairs



always, will he, and want us to go to tea in that stuffy little house every other day ?’

Paul did not know what to say. He could hardly believe that it was Celia speaking, complaining of the Colonel’s devotion to her interests, now that she had secured it. If anyone had a right to complain a little, perhaps it was Paul ; and he did not even admit such a thought into his mind. But Celia, with all her sweetness—what could be the meaning of it ?

‘Has anything happened to vex you, dear ?’ said Paul. He did not feel it necessary to reassure her about the Colonel.

‘I am only in a bad temper,’ she answered quickly. ‘Go back to Colonel Ward, and tell him you couldn’t find me.’

‘Not so very untrue, either,’ Paul reflected, for this was not the Celia he knew.

He had often thought about the magic of the woods ; all sorts of strange demons might live among those dark tall trees, whose rustle took one straight away into a German fairy-tale. Some of this enchantment might have seized on Celia.

‘ Mrs. Percival is there by this time,’ he said.

‘ All right ; then he won’t want me.’

‘ And am I to go ? I don’t like leaving you here alone. It will soon be dark, and it’s getting uncommonly cold. Don’t you think so ?’

‘ No ; I’m very hot,’ said Celia. ‘ I will come presently. You can wait for me or not, as you please.’

Paul made no answer, but waited patiently. It was cold ; the sun was not far from setting, and a chill air came breathing through the wood. No one who was not in love

would have dreamed of sitting out under trees on such an autumn evening.

‘ Dear—have I done anything to make you unhappy ?’ Paul said presently.

‘ No, and you never could,’ said Celia—a remark which might have two meanings, but Paul took the best. ‘ Only I wish you would not always be fancying things about me. It teases me, do you know. I am dreadfully independent, and I like to be left alone. Somebody—who knew me rather well—once said I was as cold as a fish, and as hard as a stone ’

‘ What lies !’

‘ I don’t know. There was truth in it, I believe. So much the worse for any poor dear things who are geese enough to care for me—so much the worse for you.’

He did not speak, but quietly took her hand and drew it down to his lips—the

right hand, which before he came had been holding a letter. After a moment she took it away from him.

‘I am not worth it, Paul,’ she said; and there was some sweetness in her voice again now. ‘I told you before, I am not fit to be spoilt. I don’t even enjoy it as I ought. I wish you would forget me sometimes, and think of something else.’

‘That’s too much to ask. I would do anything for you but that,’ said Paul, ‘especially when you are going away to-morrow.’

Celia gave a little impatient sigh.

‘I suppose you will be coming too?’

‘I don’t know. I should like to go to Paris when you are there, if you don’t mind.’

‘Oh yes, you must go with us to Paris. Perhaps you will come across that French

friend of yours again ; your friend with the grand name.'

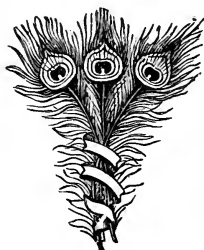
' I wish I could,' said Paul. ' Look here, some day—next year, if you like—couldn't we have a tour in that west part of France where his old place is ? He told me a lot about that country, and I think it must be very jolly. He is generally down there early in the autumn ; we might go and call upon him.'

' Yes ; I dare say it would be rather amusing,' said Celia.

She could not send Paul away ; and so, with an effort at her usual good sense, she resigned herself, and glided out of her bad temper into a better one. When she at last walked back with him to the Cottage, she was almost herself again ; only a slightly nervous flush, a shadow across her eyes, and

a little absentness of manner, could have suggested any trouble.

Mrs. Percival did not even know that she had met the postman ; and no one could guess that in her pocket she carried a passionate love - letter from her cousin Vincent.





## CHAPTER XI.

### TEA WITH THE COLONEL.

No doubt it was the humility and romance of his own nature which made it impossible for Paul to understand Celia. Honestly, in many ways, he did not think himself good enough for her; and in spite of the things she said to him sometimes—things which filled him with a sort of ‘rapturous pain’—he could hardly persuade himself that she did not think so too.

Mrs. Percival’s hint, that he might be a little morbid and distrustful, was not exactly needed, for any real distrust of Celia would

have been unbearable. He believed that she loved him, not being able to conceive of any other reason why she should have accepted him ; his ideal Celia certainly could not have been influenced by any of his possessions. Though she sometimes talked and generally behaved as if she cared for nothing deeper than amusement, fashion, fun, 'art' and money, Paul flattered himself that he saw beyond all this, and that she was generous, good, noble, clever, high-minded, earnest. Not exactly poetical or sentimental ; but all the wiser and better and truer for that, perhaps ; and he had enough of this nonsense in his composition for both of them. Possibly Celia was all the more entrancing because she was matter-of-fact.

Now Celia, whose character, as we know, was of the most simple and earthly description, could not help being conscious of the



wonderful romance that was woven about her. It could not be helped ; it was Paul's way ; and sometimes it amused her very much. Sometimes it touched her, and almost awoke the fine feelings he imagined ; then there had been instances of her really and honestly trying to make him understand her better. But those weeks at Holm, and Paul's constant companionship, had not done her any good. She was interested in Red Towers ; she was well amused, and very happy in her own way ; but she was getting a little weary of Paul and the heights on which he lived. Not that he often tried to drag her up to those heights, or tormented her with his thoughts, hopes, and opinions in any way whatever ; but she was by no means stupid, and she could not help feeling that his point of view on every subject was different from hers.

Paul, in fact, lived in a world from which at least half mankind are shut out—some people may say, fortunately for them. If he had not fallen in love with Celia he would hardly have found a word to say to her, and if Red Towers had belonged to anybody else, she would scarcely have been aware of his existence. Colonel Ward had a dim vision of these things before Celia fascinated him ; but he had forgotten all about them now.

Mrs. Percival had not been without her misgivings ; but she was not logical ; and she was capable of shutting her eyes to what she did not wish to see.

Vincent, one is inclined to think, was the most clear-sighted among these people, when he said to his cousin :

‘ You can’t marry a fellow like that—you !’

But then Vincent's motives were interested.

His convictions were, however, strong enough to make him write that letter to Celia, which had disturbed her very much more than she meant or wished to be disturbed. While Red Towers was being prepared for her—while she and her aunt were beginning to be quite absorbed in the consideration of her clothes and all her arrangements, shopping in London, shopping in Paris, plans for the prettiest wedding that had ever been seen in Woolsborough Cathedral, the Bishop himself, perhaps, to perform the ceremony, and Dr. Chanter to play magnificently on the organ—here came a letter meant to upset everything, a letter that might naturally have perished by spontaneous combustion on its way through the post ; perhaps the best thing that could have

happened to it. But it crossed sea and land in safety, and was given into the hands of Miss Celia Darrell by the old postman on his white pony, who lived on the common, and was not behind anyone else in his admiration of the Squire's young lady.

Celia was quite innocent in this matter. She had really gone out for a walk with Jack because she was cold, and rather cross—she did not know why. She met the postman quite accidentally as he rode up to the gate with his letter-bag, and with her usual good-nature she opened the gate for him. Then he said :

‘ I have got one letter for you, miss. Would you be pleased to take it ?’

And then, seeing Vincent's writing and the Indian stamp, her first impulse really and truly was to take it in to her aunt. But she opened it, and the first words were :

‘MY OWN DEAREST CELIA,

‘I have written to my mother, but have not said a word of this to her. She treated me too badly in the summer to deserve my confidence ; therefore, I leave it to you to tell her what you please.’

Having read so far, and glanced farther, Celia was conscious of a hot flush about her head, and a cold shiver everywhere else. This letter certainly was not for the public, and she positively must have a little time alone, to read it and think over it.

‘Tear it up and take no notice of it ; that will be the best way and the least troublesome. It was very wrong of him to write it,’ said something in Celia. ‘I shall do no such thing,’ Celia answered herself. ‘He was badly treated, and it is a miserable world.’

So she escaped into the wood, and found her way down into that distant corner, and sitting there, she read her cousin's letter through and through again. What had Paul's letters ever been to this? Unreasonable, dishonourable, selfish, it yet made Celia's eyes shine, and her heart beat fast, for a minute or two, as if Vincent himself was there, and she had again, for the first time, the triumphant feeling of his love for her.

What did he want her to do? First, without a moment's delay, she must break off her engagement, which in any case was too impossibly absurd and unnatural to last long; or if she did not choose to do this, she must put off her marriage a few months and break it off later. It must be done some time; she must understand that her marriage was out of the question. 'You *shall* marry me,' Vincent wrote, 'though I fear we must

wait three years. I have been promised an appointment in the spring, in an unsettled part among the hill tribes, where I could not take you. It will last three years ; after that I shall get something better. If you don't choose to break off this thing yourself, give me time, and I will write to my father and make such a row that they will have to let you do as you like. And that will be as I like, for you know you belong to me, and to nobody else in the world.'

So he went on, with stronger language than he had ever used to Celia face to face, with all the arguments of a spoilt man, unable to realize or consider any claims but his own, forgetting, too, the coldness in Celia that he had complained of, which might have made him doubt, at least, whether she would care to give up all her bright worldly prospects and wait three years for him.

Most men would have hesitated before they made such a proposal to a girl who had never confessed to anything but a cousinly fondness for them, and had never shown any wish or intention to break off her engagement. To write such a letter certainly wanted all Vincent's self-confidence, which was large.

‘Why can't I be left in peace?’ Celia sighed over the letter, for it touched her enough to make her cross and unhappy. ‘I do hate being bothered. I thought he had forgotten all about it by this 'time: I am sure I had, nearly. I only wish——well, it's no use wishing. Things can't be perfect in this world, and I certainly have no right to be discontented. I should have to break Paul's heart, and I really shouldn't like to do that; and then what an awful idea, to wait three years—and then go out to India,



which I don't at all care about—and he might get an appointment in some horrid place, dull or unhealthy! Put off my marriage! No, dear thing, by no means, if that is to give you a chance. I believe I would rather put it on.'

With all these strictly virtuous reflections, Celia ought to have been glad to see Paul when he found her in the wood. But she felt the irritability that follows on being very good, and so was not altogether glad to see him.

In the meanwhile, a very interesting talk with Colonel Ward made Mrs. Percival almost unconscious of the long delay before her two young people came in. As she sat in the only comfortable chair in his drawing-room, with Di on the hearth-rug gazing at her devoutly, the other dogs having been turned out for the occasion, a cheerful fire

crackling, and that same golden sunset light, which illumined the wood, shining in at the latticed window behind her, she began to think that this was really rather a pretty old room, and might be made something of. It was long and low, stretching across one gable of the cottage, with a window at each end; the dark walls had a few good pictures on them, the floor was covered with a hideous old drab carpet, and the furniture was hopelessly frightful, severe, but not artistically so. But on the low mantelpiece, and on the top of an oak cupboard against the wall, there were some very rare and beautiful pieces of Chinese and Indian china, an old French clock, at which Mrs. Percival gazed with envy, and some lovely ornaments in old French enamel—all quite thrown away on the Colonel, she thought. A fine Louis Quinze fan, which was lying on the mantel-

piece, the Colonel presented to his guest to screen her from the fire. As she played with its mother-o'-pearl sticks, and examined its exquisite painting, she was still more struck with the inconsistency of worldly arrangements ; it seemed more than absurd, actually wrong, that such a fan as this should belong to Colonel Ward, and not to her. Well, it might have been hers, many years ago, if she had chosen to take its owner with it. But in those remote days his uncle had not left him that good fortune which, besides his pretty things, was so utterly wasted on the poor old dear. He was not a miser, certainly ; but how ridiculous for a rich man to live in the way he did !

This train of thought, while the Colonel was poking the fire and Barty was bringing in the tea-tray, led Mrs. Percival on to wonder, as she had often

wondered before, who would be the Colonel's heir.

‘Please don't wait for them,’ she said. ‘Celia may have lost her way and gone farther than she intended. The woods are really very puzzling. Or, at any rate, we must not wonder if they are a little long—the last of these happy days together. Only this morning Celia was saying to me how very good you had been to her, Colonel Ward—and indeed I feel it too. Oh yes, sugar, please. I never can imagine why everybody doesn't take it.’

‘Nor can I,’ said the Colonel.

He was not the least anxious about Paul and Celia, and looked the picture of happiness as he waited on his old love. Her brown eyes were smiling and shining in their sweetest way. She did not look as if she missed the Canon, or wanted anything she

had not got. There was a sort of pretty tenderness in her manner to her old lover, who had remained unmarried all his life for her sake.

‘I hope the young people won’t hurry themselves for me,’ he said. ‘At this moment I’m a privileged person. As for Miss Darrell, and the pretty things she says, it is very kind of her; but I have sometimes feared she must think me an interfering old bore.’

‘Now don’t be silly,’ said Mrs. Percival in her soft sweet voice, smiling at him over her tea-cup. ‘One doesn’t expect affectation from you. You know perfectly well that we could not have got on at all without your help. Our dear Paul is of no use, and would have driven us a little wild with his unpractical ideas, which were rather extravagant too.’

‘Well, you are very kind,’ repeated the Colonel. ‘Paul is the best fellow in the world—but it is true he is too poetical for every day. Let us be thankful, for his sake, that he will have such a wife as Miss Darrell.’

‘Call her Celia,’ said Mrs. Percival; ‘she would like it, I’m sure, and so would Paul. My dear Colonel, you make me so happy! Do you know, I was afraid, at first, that you did not very much approve of Celia?’

‘Who told you so?’ asked the Colonel quickly; he could not think that Paul had betrayed him.

‘Nobody, nobody,’ said Mrs. Percival; ‘it was my own idea. But I understood it quite well. Of course you thought that Paul ought to make a better marriage. So he might—in some ways.’

‘The fellow’s guardian, you see—I felt responsible.’

And then Colonel Ward checked himself, remembering that his charming friend was the wife of the fellow's other guardian, whose conduct he had so severely blamed. He handed her the cake, poked the fire, and then went on :

‘I don't know why I should try to deceive you, Mrs. Percival. I thought Paul was too young and too boyish to know his own mind, and, considering that a property like this is hardly so profitable as you would expect from its size, and needs a good deal of management to make the best of it, I thought that when Paul married, he had better marry a sensible woman with money. And I was barely acquainted with your niece, so that——’

‘It never struck you that she had even one of these qualifications? Well, I don't wonder. I think you were quite right,’ said

Mrs. Percival. 'If Paul had belonged to me, I should have thought just the same.' Then she looked up and laughed. 'I never can remember that Paul is not a relation of yours.'

'That is very natural. I make the same mistake myself,' said the Colonel. 'What is a relation, after all? I never had a relation to care for—except my old uncle. This boy's father was as near to me as a brother—nearer than some brothers.'

'Of course he will leave him his money. What a match for Celia! She is a lucky girl!' thought Mrs. Percival. She said, after a minute, rather gravely: 'You have certainly taken his father's place with Paul, and I don't think he ought to marry without your approval. Has he got it, really, now?'

'Now that I have made the happy dis-



covery that Mrs. Percival's niece is another edition of her aunt,' said the Colonel in his stiff way, 'I could not wish a better fate for my own son if I had one.'

Mrs. Percival smiled, but a little doubtfully.

'I don't think there is much likeness; but I do honestly think they are suited to each other. Paul is very happy; we need have no fears about that. And as to Celia—it is no use fretting over the past, is it? But I only wish my poor brother-in-law had managed his affairs better, so that she might at least have had a little of her own. It is rather painful for a girl to bring absolutely nothing to her husband. Celia would feel it, I know, if she had not such perfect confidence in Paul. Oh, I can't tell you what a fortunate girl I think her!'

Colonel Ward looked very grave.

‘She is fortunate,’ he said. ‘And so is Paul,’ he added, after a moment.

There was a slight change in his manner, and Mrs. Percival was quite aware of it. She did not know, however, that it was caused by the mention of her brother-in-law, whose name reminded Colonel Ward of doubts and anxieties he had almost forgotten. She thought of something else, for which she had long felt that they owed the Colonel some sort of apology.

‘I hope you understood our motives,’ she began ; ‘our reason for keeping Celia’s engagement quite to ourselves for those few first weeks. I hope Paul explained to you——’

‘Yes, yes,’ said the Colonel, a little absently, and this was very strange in him. ‘It was your own affair ; you did quite right.’

He was thinking of Captain Darrell and his character, and then of the steadfastness which was plain to him in Celia, and the frank charm of her manner—though, to be sure, Ford had said one day how much that free way of Miss Darrell's favoured the Captain, and had been terribly snubbed for his remark. These things happened every day. It would be too hard to make a child responsible for her father's faults : 'on ne choisit pas son père,' as Charles the Tenth said one day so nobly. Not that this occurred to the excellent Colonel, who hated the French, and never could remember a quotation ; but he thought something very like it, as once and for all he laid aside the last misgiving with regard to Celia. It was not for long that he had thought of her as Tom Darrell's daughter. To him she must be Mrs. Percival's niece, Paul Romaine's

wife ; and these were two strong claims to the utmost of his faith and friendship.

‘ What is he thinking about ? ’ Mrs. Percival said to herself, for she saw that his mind had strayed far away from her.

He was pulling his moustache, and staring blankly at the fire. After two or three minutes he got up, walked across the room, and unlocked an oak cupboard on the top of which some of his best china stood. From this he took out two small old leather cases, which he brought to Mrs. Percival, and laid on the table close beside her.

‘ My wedding present for Celia,’ he said. ‘ I want you to do me a great kindness ; to take them to Hunt and Roskell, to be done up and put into new cases. I am not likely to be in town myself at present. They can send them to you at Woolsborough, and you

will then add to your kindness by giving them to Celia—with my love.'

Mrs. Percival looked up at him, smiling with delight.

'My dear Colonel,' she said, 'I wish Celia could have heard you say that. But I am not going to be quite so obliging. Oh no; Hunt and Roskell must return them to you, and then you must give them to Celia yourself, when you come to the wedding.'

'I don't think I shall be there,' said the Colonel quickly. 'No; you must really do me this favour.'

As he spoke he opened the cases, and Mrs. Percival made an exclamation, though perhaps she was not entirely surprised, for she knew that Colonel Ward had some diamonds. These that he had chosen for his present to Celia were his very best; a star and a butterfly, both magnificent; they

would have been a splendid present for a princess.

‘Oh, my dear Colonel, they are too beautiful, too magnificent,’ Mrs. Percival murmured softly, and there were really tears in her eyes. ‘Surely there must be somebody—somebody belonging to you—who has a claim to these lovely things. Celia will not know how to thank you—she will have no presents approaching these. Really, I don’t think I can let you do it.’

‘Lady Romaine’s diamonds are better than these,’ said the Colonel, smiling. ‘She will have them, of course ; and I don’t think a lady can have too many of such things. What use are they to an old fellow like me?’

‘But you ought to leave them to someone in your own family.’

‘There is no one. Since I found that I

should never marry—since Paul was born, I have meant them for his wife.’

He looked down at the table for a minute, and so did Mrs. Percival, quite understanding the gentle hint that these beautiful things might have been her own. There they lay flashing from their satin beds, which were yellow with age ; but the stones in their everlasting youth looked ready to begin a new life once more.

‘Don’t tell Miss Darrell, please,’ said the Colonel. ‘If you will kindly promise me that, I will consult you about some other plans of mine—in confidence, I mean.’

‘Anything you like to tell me is perfectly safe,’ said Mrs. Percival earnestly.

Colonel Ward took up the cases, and put them back into his cupboard, saying, ‘I will send them to you.’ Then, coming back to

the table, he poured out another cup of tea for Mrs. Percival.

‘Our young people are behaving very badly,’ she said.

‘I hope they will let me have ten minutes more with you,’ the Colonel replied gravely.

He then sat down and began to talk of his own affairs. Perhaps the deep sympathetic interest in Mrs. Percival’s face was at first more apparent than real, for at that moment the exact amount of his income and savings did not seem to matter to her much. But when a man possessed of eighty or ninety thousand pounds begins to talk of making his will, his nearest friends must feel some amount of interest. And very soon Mrs. Percival was bending forward in her chair, her hands clasped, her eyes shining, her face pale with excitement, while her old



friend ended all that he was telling her with these words :

‘I intended, as I say, to make Paul my heir, to leave him everything. But in the last few weeks I have thought of a better plan—at least, I like it better—and a few words you said just now make me think that you will like it. You have forgotten—may I remind you?—you said it was painful for a girl to bring nothing to her husband. Well, my dear’—the Colonel’s clear blue eyes looked very odd as he forgot himself in this manner—‘Paul’s wife is Paul to me, and I mean to gratify myself by leaving her—I think about seventy thousand pounds——’

‘Oh no, no!’ cried Mrs. Percival, flushing scarlet.

‘Why not?’ said the Colonel quietly.

‘It is too much. Celia doesn’t deserve it. She has no claim on you.’

‘It is not a question of claims. Neither has Paul any claim; but he is my dear old friend’s son, and Celia belongs to you.’

At that moment the click of the garden gate announced Paul and Celia.

‘Don’t make any difficulty, please,’ said Colonel Ward, gravely and quickly. ‘Only oblige me by keeping my plans to yourself. The thing is not done yet, and I do not wish her to know before her wedding-day.’

Mrs. Percival had started up from her chair, and was standing by the chimney-piece. At that moment she could find no words, being torn by a conflict of feelings; her eyes were full of tears, and she held out her hand to her old lover, who stooped and kissed it. He had seldom, perhaps, known a much happier moment.

Mrs. Percival laughed at Paul and Celia when they came in, and teased them for

being so long ; the Colonel was grave and polite as usual. One thought went on tormenting Mrs. Percival, while she was the life of the little party.

‘ Seventy thousand pounds ! My poor Vincent ! If Celia had that, and he could marry her ! ’

And the instant answer, ‘ It is only her marrying Paul that gives her a chance of it,’ was, strangely enough, of no use whatever in driving that thought away.

As they were travelling up to town the next day, Celia said to Mrs. Percival :

‘ I had a letter from Vincent yesterday. When you write, will you give my love to him, and say I will answer it soon ? ’

‘ Yesterday ! ’ said Mrs. Percival.

‘ Yes. I met the postman on the road. I forgot to tell you.’

‘ What did he say ? ’

‘ Vincent ? Oh, nothing particular. It was a very kind letter.’

Celia looked out of the window, and her aunt did not find it necessary to say any more.





## CHAPTER XII.

### LA TOUR BLANCHE.

THROUGH the fields of France, past vineyard slopes bare and brown, past running streams, old white water-mills, rows of poplars whose few yellow leaves rustled softly against their slender grey stems, from one little wayside town, with its quaint old church, to another, with its stately old château, a Frenchman and his daughter were travelling down from Tours into the west.

The two were a curious contrast, and no one would have guessed at once that they were father and child. He was tall, broad,

and fair ; she, a girl of about fourteen, very small and childish-looking for her age, was extremely dark, with a fine, delicate little profile, large black eyes of velvet softness, with long curling lashes, and a quantity of jet-black hair, which made a natural frizz all over her head, and fell in a thick curly mane on her shoulders. She was dressed in a thick dark blue frock, with a picturesque sort of cloak caught up with ribbons, and a round hat on the back of her head, under which the bright little face changed its expression twenty times in a minute.

She and her father were alone in the railway-carriage, and were talking and laughing as fast as they could—she was talking, that is, and he was laughing at her jokes, and at the stories she was telling him about her friends at the convent she had just left. It was all very amusing, it seemed ; but every-

body was as amiable as possible, and as to the reverend mothers, she loved them with all her heart.

‘I do not quite know why grandmamma means to send me to a new convent, papa,’ she said, with the first faint shadow on her face.

He looked troubled, too, for a moment.

‘That you may be near her, petite, you understand. And near me, too, when I am in Paris—after all, though, the fault is not grandmamma’s ; it’s mine.’

‘Ah, bad little papa ! you don’t know what it is to make all your friends over again, and your enemies, too. And they are sure to be horrid girls in Paris, who won’t let me tease them. Ah, I shall have to be so very *comme il faut*, it breaks my heart to think of it.’

‘La, la ! don’t let us hear about broken

hearts, and all those tragedies. There are worse things to make over again than friends, or enemies either.'

'Confessions, when one has committed the same sins over and over again!' suggested the child, lifting her eyebrows with a solemn little air.

'Ah, yes, terrible,' said her father, smiling faintly. 'Well, Antoinette, your grand-mamma and I have been obliged to talk things over seriously.'

'That was a little terrible.'

'Yes, more than a little. And she wanted you near her, which was quite right, and I wanted you, just at this moment, to go home with me for two days. So grand-mamma wrote to the Reverend Mother and arranged it, do you see? And your holidays this winter will be longer than usual, because I shall take you back to Paris with me.'



And listen : grandmamma thinks you will catch cold, if you go with me to La Tour Blanche when all the leaves are falling. You must promise me to do nothing of the sort, or I leave you at Saint-Bernard with Madame de Cernay.'

'If you please, papa, don't do that!' exclaimed Antoinette.

'Very well ; but remember, if you go to Paris with a cough, grandmamma will never forgive me. The poor dear lady hates La Tour Blanche already, and what would she say then ? She would take my little Netta away from me for ever.'

'Oh no, papa ; you and I will be very careful,' said the child, slipping her hand into his arm. 'We both love old Tour Blanche ; we won't let grandmamma hate it any more. Do you know what I should like, little papa, if I could have my own way ?'

‘Something extravagant. A fine velvet frock, for instance, instead of this old blue thing.’

‘No—well, it is absolutely older than you think, though I do wear out my frocks faster than other people. But this is a beautiful plan. I said it at recreation the other day, when we all gave our ideas of happiness—to live alone with you at La Tour Blanche. The others laughed, but it was quite true. I can’t think of anything happier. We should never be sad or dull, you and I ; we understand each other so magnificently. We should amuse ourselves all day long, and never want to go to Paris. I don’t care for Paris, myself.’

Her father made no answer at once, but leaned back in his seat, pulling his fair moustache, and stared out of the opposite window.

‘What, nobody but you and I? Not grandmamma?’ he said.

‘No, she would always be calling me in to take care of my complexion. Besides, she wouldn’t come.’

‘And you would grow up a nice little savage. And have you forgotten that the place is half tumbling down, stained with damp, half furnished, except with dust, and rats, and ghosts?’

‘Ah, mon Dieu!’ murmured Antoinette; and she crossed herself, for the train was gliding past a cemetery on a hill, at the entrance of a little town. ‘I would rather live in it like that, than not at all,’ she said. ‘But we must restore it, like M. de Cernay. I have heard you say that Saint-Bernard was a funny old place years ago.’

‘So it was, petite; but M. de Cernay is a rich man, do you see? I am a poor man.

But here we are : we must talk about these things another time.'

After passing under the cemetery hill they crept a few hundred yards farther, between garden walls, till they reached the small station of Saint-Bernard, and here they got out. The fierce faces of the station officials softened as they greeted Antoinette's father ; he was evidently a popular man.

'Bonjour, M. le Marquis. Pommard is outside there with the dogcart,' said one of them.

'M. le Baron was here just now, asking for monsieur,' cried another. 'Somebody told him the train had come in, and he went away.'

'He is not far off. Call him back, somebody. Your baggage, monsieur : allow me.'

Even a few years ago, it was by no means common for a French gentleman in his own

country to meet with all these signs of popularity. But this man was a hero among his own people, partly from the extraordinary sweet temper and good nature which saved some men of his kind in the great Revolution. They were proud of him, and somehow not envious, as he stood among them like a great fair Englishman, taller than any of them ; and the English were popular in France then. Outside the station a shabby dogcart was waiting, drawn by a rough-coated horse, which a young man in plain clothes was holding. If a Marquis's coronet had not been visible on cart and harness, the conveyance, from its looks, might have belonged to some farmer.

‘We shall overtake M. de Cernay,’ said the Marquis, as he helped his daughter into the front seat of the dogcart. But before he had time to get in himself, a small, dark,

ugly man came bustling back along the road, hot with haste, under the grey November sky.

‘My dear Montmirail! My dear Achille!’ cried M. de Cernay, whose smile was most agreeable. ‘You are not going straight off to La Tour Blanche? Mademoiselle, how do you do? Charmed to see you: it is a privilege to see our neighbours again. But you must dine and sleep at our house, my dear Achille. My wife will never forgive me if I go back without you and Mdlle. Antoinette.’

‘Thank you, my dear friend, but——’

‘No excuses. We have a great deal to say to you. We have had letters that concern you. What do you say now?’ M. de Cernay stopped, smiling more than ever, for some strange agitation showed itself in his friend’s face.

‘Look here,’ said the Marquis, laying his hand on De Cernay’s shoulder. ‘Do me this kindness. Make my excuses to Madame de Cernay for this evening, and if you have nothing better to do to-morrow and will drive over to breakfast at La Tour Blanche, I shall be enchanted to see you. There we can talk things over, and you can tell me about—these letters. If Madame de Cernay will honour me and Antoinette by coming with you, though I hardly dare ask her to such an establishment——’

‘She will, she will—charmed to renew her friendship with Mdlle. Antoinette—who, upon my word, is more beautiful than ever,’ he added confidentially, with a laughing glance at the child, who smiled at him brightly.

‘Dear little M. de Cernay!’ she said, as she drove away with her father. ‘He

is very good, but not very good-looking ; what do you say ?

‘ I say there are not many good-looking people in the world.’

‘ You need not complain ; you see one whenever you look in the glass.’

‘ Little flatterer, you expect me to believe you. And no doubt you believed M. de Cernay when he said you were beautiful.’

‘ Ah no,’ she said a little sadly ; ‘ I am too black to be pretty ; all the girls say so. That was only one of his kind speeches. Don’t you think, papa, that women ought to be fair ?’

‘ They say so. I don’t know,’ he answered rather carelessly. Perhaps he was thinking of something else.

‘ Mamma was dark, to be sure,’ she whispered to herself ; and then M. de Montmirail whipped the horse impatiently.



‘You should have had him clipped, Pom-mard.’

‘M. le Marquis gave no orders,’ answered his man.

They drove through the low white outskirts of the little town, and then for some distance along a high-road, yellow and even, bordered by grass banks with stately grey poplars, large and old, growing in them at regular intervals. Between each five or six of these poplars was a square and tidy heap of stones for mending the road, arranged there by the ‘cantonniers,’ who do their work in this artistic fashion. The road ran on perfectly straight up and down hill, as far as one could see, but M. de Montmirail did not drive very far along it. He turned into a green grassy-sided lane, sheltered by bushes and willow-trees, near a clear, quiet stream, where a few small cows and goats

were feeding, under the care of a group of wild-looking children. Then he turned up a hill, away from the stream, leaving on the left a picturesque old mill, and some thatched farm-buildings standing among poplars.

The lane divided itself here, one branch running on by the stream and the trees, the other climbing to higher ground, and presently coming out on a bare upland, with great brown ploughed fields stretching away on each side, bleak and lonely, and trees and roofs only to be seen in the distance.

But as they drove on, approaching the brow of a steepish hill, the road made a sudden turn down to the left, and a rich and pretty valley lay before them. In summer it must have been a mass of greenery ; now some of the trees were bare, but others were still clothed in brown and

gold and lingering green, and with the red roofs of a village clustered and half hidden amongst them, even under that grey November sky the valley had a beauty of its own. Looking down from this point on the road, one saw the white church-spire rising below among the varied roofs, and the little shady cemetery enclosed within its walls ; and then came the picturesque confusion of trees, rows of poplars marking the stream as it ran through deep meadows and under the road ; and then, on the opposite slope, the clustered trees broke above into bare slopes of vineyard facing the sun, and the top of the hill, higher than on this side of the valley, was covered with dark, gloomy-looking fir-woods.

But the chief feature of that slope was a large white building that rose among the thickest of the trees, a great white tower

or *pavillon*, its grey slated roof glimmering, looking down on the village in the hollow with an air of stately command and kind protection, as if the great Revolution, for instance, was a thing that had never really come to pass, or at least was not worth remembering.

‘Dear old Tour Blanche!’ exclaimed little Antoinette de Montmirail, as she came in sight of that wild old house among the trees. ‘I wish we were going to stay there always.’

‘Do you? Well, I partly agree with you,’ said her father. ‘I should like to live there most of the year, but that is impossible unless the house can be restored; and pray where is the money to come from?’

‘Oh, I hate money,’ said Antoinette. ‘What happiness if it had never been invented!’

‘ I don’t know, after all,’ said her father, as they drove down into the village street, ‘ that it would be wise to spend so much money here. You see, we have so little land here now. The wise thing would be to sell it to some good man who has made a fortune by chocolate or caramels. What do you say to that? Monsieur et Madame Chocolat, et les petits Chocolat. A grand day for the old Tour Blanche. They would fill it with splendid china, and Louis Quinze furniture, and Gobelins tapestry, and live there magnificently. What do you say? Shall we do it? Your grandmother would be enchanted.’

‘ And two people’s hearts would be broken.’

‘ Whose, then ?’

‘ Mine and M. de Cernay’s.’

‘ Ah, yes, you are right. M. de Cernay wants me to live here as much as you do.

But he knows the difficulties better than you. In fact, I will tell you a secret.' The cheerful Achille bent down to his little daughter, and looked quite solemnly into her eyes. 'There is only one way in which I can live here, and restore the château,' he said close to her ear.

'Is there a way?' she said, gazing up with bright intelligence.

'Yes. Say no more now; here comes M. le Curé. Perhaps I will tell you more to-morrow.'

It was necessary to stop and speak to M. le Curé, who smiled welcome all over his sturdy brown face.

'You had my letter?' said the Marquis.

'Certainly, monsieur; I was expecting it. At nine o'clock to-morrow, then.'

'If you please. And you will stay to breakfast with us, M. le Curé?'

'With pleasure, monsieur.'

There were plenty more greetings as they drove through the village: the inn-keeper, standing at his door under his sign of Le Corbeau Blanc; the bricklayer, the blacksmith, working at their trades in the street. The Marquis's hat was constantly off to these and others, and to the women carrying home loaves from the baker or returning wearily from their washing on the river brink; all these looked up smilingly at the little demoiselle and her father.

‘They all like you, papa,’ she said, when at last the bridge was crossed and they were driving up the wild, untidy, overgrown old avenue of the château.

‘They would have much more reason to like M. Chocolat.’

‘Oh no,’ answered the girl quickly; ‘you know very well that the peasants never like the *bourgeoisie*.’

‘Where did you get all your knowledge of the world?’ he said.

‘Not at the convent, you imagine? Bah! one learns a good deal in life besides one’s lessons,’ said Mdlle. Antoinette.

‘No doubt; but it generally takes a little time, and you are already as wise as your grandmother. What a noise the dogs make!’

‘Ah, dear old Ponto, and Fido, and Rataplan! What joy to run about with them again!’ she cried; and she was ready to spring out of the dogcart before it stopped.

‘Patience, mademoiselle! a person of your knowledge——’ her father remonstrated.

Out of the dimness of the avenue they came into a large court, covered with gravel, and rather weedy. Down the two sides of



this court ran high white stone walls, their ruinous state half hidden by the ivy that clustered over them, and the great chestnut and walnut trees that sheltered them. Each wall ended in a round turret, white, with a pointed grey roof, also half in ruins, and overgrown with ivy. Across the upper side of the square lay the house itself, mounted on a high terrace, and evidently, by the remains of old walls and foundations about it, much smaller now than it had been in former times. On the west side was the great tower that commanded the valley—white, square, and heavy, with windows here and there. Below this, a long slated roof with a ridge of twisted iron-work ran along to another *pavillon* to the east, smaller, and more inhabited-looking. Then the line of building was broken by an archway with a tall iron gate, reached by a flight of steps,

and opening into some sort of garden or *plaisance* behind the château. These steps led also to the door of the chapel, the ancient stones and low vaulting of which showed a greater age than that of the rest of the building. Behind the chapel, to the east, was the stable-yard, sheltered by great trees ; and another high white archway led into the yard belonging to a range of farm-buildings ; vast barns, with wine-cellars underneath them ; cow-houses, pigsties, a duck-pond, more great walnut-trees stretching their boughs across a scene of more than Irish untidiness, with the low door and windows of the farmer's house opening on a grass-grown, uneven causeway, raised a few inches above it all.

To the little Demoiselle de Montmirail, this château was her beautiful old home, and she would hardly even confess that it wanted

restoring. All the windows were unshuttered to-day, the doors stood open, and two old friends were waiting on the steps of the terrace. Antoinette jumped down at once into the arms of her old nurse, Suzanne, whose husband, the old *valet de chambre*, as disagreeable as he was clever and faithful, came forward with a stiff bow and a vinegar smile to receive his master.

‘Come then, my child,’ said Suzanne, and with many loving and admiring remarks she took her little lady into the house, a small black-and-tan terrier dancing joyfully round them, while the dogs in the yard barked their loudest.

Suzanne was a handsome, fat, comfortable woman, with a smiling face and pleasant dark eyes. Everyone under her charge was in peace and in clover. She wore a nice white cap with flying strings, a thick

blue linsey skirt, and a loose black jacket. She and Antoinette hurried together into the bare stone hall of the château, from which a broad, shallow staircase of stone led to the upper rooms.

The house was narrow in proportion to its length and height, like all the houses of its time, and the upper story had originally consisted of large rooms opening one into the other throughout the length of the *corps de logis*. The great tower was divided from the rest of the house by the staircase, and its rooms had not been used for some years. They had been put in order and furnished for the young Marquise, Antoinette's mother, but she had died when her child was not more than two years old, and her husband, living there very little, had never used the tower rooms since. In his father's time, the great inconvenient

rooms in the other part of the house had been partitioned and made into smaller ones, with a corridor running along behind them.

The universal brick floors of earlier days had also been changed for wooden ones ; but all was now bare and shabby and dilapidated ; and there certainly was nothing lovable or attractive in the stern old place, with its white walls two or three yards thick, to explain Antoinette's affection for it.

‘ Mademoiselle's own room is ready for her,’ said Suzanne, as her young mistress sprang upstairs before her.

And certainly there was something very cheerful in mademoiselle's own room. Its high window looked out to the terrace, where all the dogs were now jumping round M. le Marquis ; it was papered,

ceiling and all, with bright pink stripes ; the curtains and cover of the bed were also pink. There were gay rugs on the floor, the chimney-piece had a smart clock, and was also adorned with a variety of glass and china which Suzanne had collected at different fêtes and offered to mademoiselle ; there were little pictures on the walls, more bright than beautiful, and by the bed hung a branch of box, now very dead, which had no doubt been blessed in church on Palm Sunday. There were a few old red velvet chairs, a little old chest of drawers, and an arrangement for *eau sucrée*.

Suzanne had taken great pains to make this room what she thought her young lady's room ought to be. Behind the brass dogs on the hearth a bright wood fire was burning.

‘ Oh, Suzanne, how pretty it all is ! ’ said

the child, and standing in the middle of the floor, she made two or three little jumps in the air. ‘If papa would only restore the house, and let us live here always! I think I have put it into his head, you know.’

‘Ah, dame! that is good news indeed. mademoiselle,’ said Suzanne.

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